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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STRENGTH IN WHAT REMAINS:
WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO WILLIAM INGE

BY

JAMES EADIE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1993

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled STRENGTH IN WHAT REMAINS: WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO WILLIAM INGE submitted by James P. Eadie in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in DRAMA.

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June 30, 1992

ABSTRACT

In the mid-1950's, William Inge was considered to be a major American playwright and was mentioned in the same breath with Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Fifteen years later, neither the playwright nor his works were seldom more than mentioned. The thesis explores some of the aspects of the playwright's work (from his beginnings to the end of the Broadway period) which might explain the reason for this "fall from grace".

Chapter One indicates that the study will concentrate on Inge's published plays and the themes and characters therein; Chapter Two provides a brief outline of Inge's chronology. Chapter Three considers the one-act plays which Inge was writing at the same time as he was involved with his first major success, Come Back Little Sheba (1950). The themes of hope and despair and their links with sexual frustration are strongly evident in these "sketches" which often served as the basis for other major works. Also Inge's exploration of innocence is a mjaor theme in these plays, which often feature children or characters whose emotional development has been somehow arrested. Chapter Four concentrates upon the four major consecutive Broadway successes in Inge's career: Sheba, Picnic (1953), Bus Stop (1955, based on the one-act "People in the Wind"), and The Dark At The Top of the Stairs (1957, which brought Inge full-circle since it was a re-working of his first play, "Farther Off From Heaven"). In Chapter Five the remaining Broadway plays in which Inge began to shift his focus of identification from character to theme.are considered. An obvious shift away from hope for the plays' protagonists identifies itself in A Loss of Roses (1959), Natural Affection (1963) and Where's Daddy (1966).

The thesis suggests that Inge's characters become increasingly entrapped within the themes he explored and that those themes became more and more connected to sexual repression. Chapter Six explores Inge's settings as a metaphor for the theme of entrappment. Evidence is provided that "an escape hatch" is built into those plays which leaves some vestige of hope for the protagonist(s) and that none exists in the later plays.

Chapter Seven calls for more investigation into Inge's collaborations while his collaborators are still alive, and further suggests that there is room for much more research into the themes chosen by this playwright.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

> . . . every suicide I ever heard of came to me in the same way,with no preparation. I have never heard of a suicide that I expected.[1]

In the preface to Four Plays by William Inge, the playwright uses these words to discuss Sammy Goldenbaum, one of his most fascinating creations. Today, the passage has an eerie shadow because Inge took his own life only fifteen years later.

At the time of the publication of this anthology, Inge was near the top of the American literary heap. He was celebrated as one of America's leading playwrights, mentioned in the same breath with his contemporaries Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. At the time of his death, fifteen years later, William Inge was barely mentioned in critical analyses of the American theatre. The three plays produced between 1958 and 1966 had received steadily declining acceptance by both critics and theatre-goers, and his career as a screenwriter, which had blazed bright in 1961, was over in less than five years. Although Inge continued to write plays until just before his suicide in 1973, few of these were workshopped or performed. Despite the fact that his major plays are still performed in his home-ground of the mid-West, the ashes had been cold on his public career long before he ended his existence. What could have happened?

Inge provides some clue in the sentence which follows the quotation above:

> . . . We always find the reasons for such events after they happen, in re-exploring the character to find motivations we had previously over-looked . . . .(Four Plays ix)

Newspaper accounts of his passing make it fairly clear that the playwright's death was, at the time, considered to be cancer related.[2] In his recent revision of an early biography, Shuman sheds more light:

> Early in June 1973, he was admitted to the UCLA Medical Center for psychiatric observation after he had tried to end his life with a drug overdose. He was released from the hospital after a few days,

---

[1] William Inge, Introduction. Four Plays by . . ., (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1958), ix. Subsequent reference in the text to this work will be identified as "Four Plays".

[2] The dichotomy surrounding Inge's "suicide" was suggested immediately after his death in "William Inge, Playwright is Dead," New York Times, 11 June 1973, 1.

> returning to the home he shared with his sister Helene. It was she who found him in their garage behind the wheel of his automobile, dead of carbon monoxide poisoning, in the pre-dawn hours of 10 June 1973.[3]

Is there a case for another brutal suicide as well; a case for the suicide of a writer in despair for whatever it was that had drawn him to writing in the first place? Shuman's next line casts even more light:

> On the table in their living room was an unopened brown envelope containing the typescript of Inge's latest novel, "The Boy from the Circus," which a New York publisher had rejected. (Shuman 19)

What happened to the strong young voice from the Mid-West? In the nearly twenty years since his death, no major revival of his work has taken place, and no biography of the playwright other than Shuman's revision has appeared. True, amateur societies occasionally mount one of his best-known quartet (Come Back, Little Sheba, Picnic, Bus Stop and The Dark at the Top of the Stairs). Dinner theatres will dust off one of these titles to showcase a "guest star", particularly if the single setting can be economically produced. The most recent remounting of an Inge play in a major centre was just such an outing. On February 27, 1990, Bus Stop opened in London's Lyric Theatre as a vehicle for Mick Jagger's girlfriend, Jerry Hall. It closed almost immediately.

Although the man is not so much our concern as is his work, the two are difficult to consider as mutually exclusive. Changes took place in his writing over that fifteen-year period that brought a promising theatrical career to a standstill. Whether those changes occasioned his physical demise is not of primary concern here. What is being sought are the specifics that stilled Inge's voice for American audiences. The search must be conducted through the primary sources; not in literary speculation but in what the man himself wrote. Therefore, the plays themseleves are the major texts: the scripts because he was a writer, and their presentations because he was a dramatist.

Neither is the purpose here to compare Inge's work (either on the page or on the stage) with any other playwright, living or dead. The fact that he shares many themes and even character types with Williams and Miller shall be left as a

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[3] R. Baird Shuman, William Inge. Rev. ed. . (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1989) 19

matter of interest only. The major concerns herein are his themes and characters as Inge dealt with them. In an effort to see if any definable changes take place in his attitudes, his themes and characters must be traced from their beginnings in his one-act sketches through their treatment in the major successes to their final appearances in the last three plays which appeared before the public.

The pages which follow explore specific themes of the playwright as they develop from his one-act beginnings through the major plays to the final Broadway efforts of the 1960's, A Loss of Roses, Natural Affection and Where's Daddy?. As in all good theatre, the themes are often best examined through the situations the playwright creates for his characters, and, therefore, those situations and the characters themselves shall also be a major consideration. Certain character types are used from play to play, and their evolution can help to trace Inge's exploration of such universals as cynicism and despair, and love and hope, within the human condition.

A major feature of the shifting theatre scene in America during that crucial sixteen-year period was the approach being taken to the importance of staging itself. Any consideration of a playwright's work would have to touch upon how he related to those changes, and to those whose collaboration affected how the playwright came to relate to those changes. Joshua Logan and Elia Kazan, who directed some of Inge's major successes, were such collaborators, and their contribution should be considered. Inge also made specific suggestions for staging (to help the director) and wrote quite copiously about character relations and motivations (to help the performers). Such comments are part of the text and therefore constitute part of this study. Subtle changes emerge over the sixteen years of his dramatic career (1950 - 1966) which may also cast some light upon his changing world view.

Those who have been called great playwrights in any age have not always managed to maintain the audiences of subsequent ages. Others become historical references known only to the cognoscente. Some manage to keep their "strength" before us all, others compromise to please the audiences of the moment and the whims of the hour, still others speak in a voice that must be hushed until another, more tolerant period. Ultimately, all playwrights must be assessed through an exploration of what they wrote. On that basis they attain their place in literary history. Hopefully through an exploration of his characters,

his themes, and his shifting world view, the same can begin to be determined for William Inge.

CHAPTER II A BACKGROUND TO WILLIAM INGE

Despite the decision to concentrate upon Inge's work rather than his life, it is necessary to outline quickly the major chronological events which served as a background for the creative work itself. It is also obvious that a fascinating thesis could be researched from these chronological events; a thesis which might indeed shed light upon the motivations behind the works we will consider here.

Inge was born May 3, 1913, in Independence, Kansas, the fifth and final child of Luther Clayton Inge and his wife Maude Sarah. He grew up in Independence and made several trips to Kansas city to see theatrical productions, one of which was The Barretts of Wimpole Street with Katharine Cornell. He attended the University of Kansas, from which he graduated in 1935 with a B. A. He attempted a second degree at the George Peabody College of Teachers but did not graduate, withdrawing two weeks before graduation because of illness. Inge obtained work as a radio announcer and a teacher until he obtained an M. A. in 1938. His thesis was "David Belasco and the Age of Photographic Realism in the American Theatre". Later, in Columbia, Missouri, he taught English and Dramatics for Stephen's College, where Maude Adams[1] headed the Drama Department. Between 1943 and 1946 he worked as a drama critic for the St. Louis Star Times and interviewed Tennessee Williams in 1944, after travelling to Chicago to see The Glass Menagerie. Within months, he wrote his first short play Farther Off From Heaven, which he admits served as the basis for his later full-length play The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. At the suggestion of Williams, this inaugural play was produced by Margo Jones for her Little Theatre group in Dallas, Texas (in June, 1947), and led to his first major success, Come Back, Little Sheba, which was produced by the Theatre Guild, first in Westport, Connecticut (September 4, 1949), and then on Broadway.

Come Back, Little Sheba shows the influence of psychological theories which obviously interested Inge, but he only entered psychoanalysis himself after Sheba opened to warm critical reviews. In 1953 his second Broadway play, Picnic, won The Pulitzer Prize in Drama, the Donaldson Award, the Drama Critic's Circle Award, and was honored as the best play of the year by the Outer

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[1] Maude ADAMS (1872-1953) Most famous for her trouser roles: Peter Pan, L'Aiglon, Rosalind. Adams retired in 1918. She served for several years as professor of dramatic art at Stephen's College in Columbia, Missouri. (William C. Young, Famous Actors and Acresses on the American Stage, Documents of American Theatre History, New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1975,) 76

Critic's Circle. Inge sold the movie rights for $300,000. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous in the same year. In 1955 Bus Stop opened on Broadway to excellent reviews. It was followed in 1957 by The Dark at the Top of the Stairs,which earned Inge his first adverse criticism. Two years later, A Loss of Roses, the play which marked the debut of Inge's young protege Warren Beatty, closed after twenty-five performances in New York. That same year Inge's four major successes were anthologized and published by Random House. Inge turned to Hollywood, which had already filmed each of his Broadway plays, and wrote an original screenplay for Warner Brothers. Splendor in the Grass introduced Warren Beatty to an international film career and won Inge the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay of 1961. Inge himself plays the minister in the film.

In 1963 he returned to Broadway with Natural Affection, which garnered the worst reviews of his career. After a forgettable television production and a major dispute with Universal pictures over the script for Bus Riley's Back in Town (based on a one-act play of his which in turn had been a short story) Inge tried Broadway once more with Where's Daddy? in 1966. Although he published two short novels in the early '70's,wrote one final full-length script, The Last Pad, and several one-act plays (most of which remain unpublished) Inge was never to see a new play produced for the stage again.[2] In 1973 , on June 2, he was admitted to the UCLA Medical Center for an overdose of barbiturates. He was rumored to have been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The next day he was transferred to the psychiatric unit of the hospital but checked himself out on June 5. Five days later he was found dead by his sister.

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[2] The Last Pad was produced off-Broadway in 1970 and had been mounted at UCLA in the late sixties. There is no indication whether or not Inge actually attended these productions.

CHAPTER III THE ONE-ACT PLAYS

> I try to find all that I can in the human lives that I know and are available to me -- and to find the meanings in those lives secondarily. I'll always have to work that way rather than to take a theme and work in the characters secondarily.[1]

In this interview with the New York Times, Inge defined the order in which he placed the matters of theme and character. Although it is clear that in his case the character evolved first, it is difficult to examine one without the other. Both Inge's themes and characters were introduced in his one-act plays, and then they, or some of them, were expanded in the full-length plays. In his preface to Summer Brave and Eleven Short Plays, Inge declared that his one-acts were "fragments or sketches that I have written in exploration of characters in larger works that I may or may not develop in the future."[2]

During the period between 1949 and 1957, Inge was creating a catalogue of character types both in the major plays he was writing at the time and in the one-act plays, most of which were sketched in that nine-year period. As a basis for later comparison let us look at the identifiable character types and at those themes that began to emerge from their exploration before considering their evolutions in the major works.

Inge wrote a fairly autobiographical long one-act play, "Farther Off From Heaven", before he began his major output. Then he composed a dozen one-act plays at the same time as he was preparing his three major successes, that is, between the years 1949 and 1957. These three and the play that followed, The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs, constitute the body of work for which he is best known.

Three of those four are each foreshadowed by a shorter play: Summer Brave (at two-acts) was an alternate version of Picnic (1953); "People in the Wind" became Bus Stop (1955); and his first play, "Farther Off From Heaven", is more fully realized as The Dark at the Top of the Stairs (1957). His screenplays benefited from these one-acts as well: Splendor in the Grass (1961) is an expansion of "Glory in the Flower" (1957), and Bus Riley's Back in Town (1965) is based on a one-act of the same title written in the 1950's. These two one-acts

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[1] Interview in the New York Times, 20 February 1953.

[2] William.Inge, Summer Brave and Eleven Short Plays (New York: Random House 1962.) x. Subsequent references in the text to this work will be identified as "Summer Brave".

are variations on each other, featuring the same character names and basically two re-workings of the same plot situation.

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, which can be seen both as his last success and as the first of the plays which illustrate his decline, was first produced at the end of that time, 1957. He had come full circle, because The Dark at the Top of the Stairs is an expanded version of "Farther Off From Heaven", his first staged work. His only other one-act, "The Mall", was published (in Esquire magazine) in 1959, the same year as the next Broadway play (A Loss of Roses) opened to (to be kind) "mixed reviews". There were no further one-acts until after his Broadway failures, Natural Affection (1963) and Where's Daddy? (1966).

"The Mall" provides a kind of blue-print for both the themes and the characters Inge was constantly exploring. He himself says in the preface to the acting edition :

> This is a play that has come out of my own fantasies about characters I have noticed on summer strolls through Central Park, people who seem to live in the park during permissible weather[,] people who seem reduced to the pursuit of the most basic human needs. It was an attempt to write a play that made its dramatic point by a kind of combustion of forces rather than by a real narration. I had just wanted to contrast certain kinds of love and dramatize people in their pursuit of love. I found most interesting the older man's blind desperation in search for love in contrast with the young people's almost accidental discovery of love.[3]

In our search for themes in Inge's work, we can easily begin there: with both "blind desperation" and "accidental discovery", or simply with "search" and "discovery". Whatever the specific may be from play to play and character to character, each is involved in some way with the "pursuit of love", with some elusive variation of our language's most irregular verb. The last one-act will be considered first, and the first one-act, "Farther Off From Heaven", will be discussed in conjunction with the end of his successful period, when the play The Dark at the Top of the Stairs is considered.

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[3] William Inge, Eleven Short Plays (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1962) 109. Subsequent reference in the text to this work will be identified as "Short Plays".

"The Mall"

At the beginning of "The Mall", we immediately see contrasting pairs of women: The Matrons (1 and 2) and the Crones (1 and 2). The matrons are resting between bouts of jogging in search of some elusive rejuvenation process which diet and exercise are supposed to ensure. The crones "have decided to let life pass them by, and they would never admit to a feeling of loss" (Short Plays 110-11). Together they form a sort of Greek chorus divided neatly down the middle. The matrons leave early in the play, however, and do not return until the end. Because they are involved in their own pursuits, they miss the events that unfold before the crones, who are *"as weathered as the benches and the scenery surrounding them, [of] all of which they seem a living part"* (Short Plays 110). This is the first use of a device (contrasting pairs) which Inge will use again in later plays like "People in the Wind" and The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, and he uses it in "The Mall" to emphasize the contrasts of point of view. The crones will never admit to having let life pass them by; the matrons are still struggling with balancing families and duties and contacts and husbands while battling the wages of time upon their own persons.

The young sailor who enters waiting for his "sweet patootie", as the crones term it, heralds the arrival of the next pair of contrasts. Crone 2 asks, "Is it time for the lovers?" and her partner answers, "It's always time for the lovers, Sister. Love goes around the clock" (Short Plays 112). The sailor is followed by two men "around forty": Barney is large and wears a suit which is clean but unpressed, and his partner Dell is "rather small" and dressed in "the working clothes of a laborer"(Short Plays 112). Dell is trying to persuade Barney to take the doctor's advice, but Barney is here to find Clara and will not listen. The sailor will leave tomorrow; Barney has just been released from "a hospital" where something was done to his head. The sailor is trembling on the brink of adventure; Barney is searching for a bright moment from his past. Dell is "the hero's friend", a character particularly important to Inge, who has already used this character in several plays and will attempt to do so in the plays that remain.[4] Are such characters made an obvious device to provide exposition? Usually not, for there is always an unspoken bond between this character and the lover character, which in "The Mall" Barney represents in one incarnation and which

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[4] The friend is personified in Virgil Blessing in Bus Stop and will feature to lesser success in Jelly of A Loss Of Roses and Razz/Pinky in Where's Daddy?

the young white-clad sailor represents in another. The contrasting pairs need not always be acquainted.[5] Dell pressures Barney several times to leave this place and find a better girl. He repeats: "I just want ya to be all right" (Short Plays 114). Finally Barney lashes out at him:

> God damn ya, don't you know you can't make me all right, whatever's the matter with me? Don't you know that every man's gotta find his salvation somewhere inside hisself? And that regardless how sick I be, and how mixed up inside me, no amount of preachin', no amount of coaxin' and needlin' and cautionin' is gonna do any good unless I feel some change in here *(he pounds his breast)*. That's where it's gotta come from. (Short Plays 114)

As Barney is finally persuaded to sit down while he waits, the Girl arrives to complete the younger love pair.

The sailor and the girl are obviously tremendously attracted to each other, although they have only met recently through a blind date arranged by his buddy, Ernie, and her girlfriend, Helen. In "The Mall" we never see these characters, although Inge has often introduced them in other plays.[6] In contrast to the lover's best friend (represented here by Dell), these characters are often used to provide exposition and are seldom fully realized. Here he mentions them only in passing and avoids the kind of clutter they often can impose. The young romance has problems: they each have obligations. She is underage and has lied to her parents in order to be here tonight; in the morning, he is leaving for many months. In a speech parallel to Barney's, the sailor mourns:

> SAILOR *(With a feeling of futility.)* It just ain't fair. You go along your usual way, feelin' you're happy, takin' what comes, not carin' about too much one way or the other. . . Then zowie! one day it happens. You fall in love. And it makes your whole life up until then seem kinda pointless.
> GIRL That's the way I feel too.
> SAILOR And then you can't just go back to your old life. 'Cause it don't seem no good. (Short Plays 116)

The sailor tells his girl that he won't be back in less than a year, and she exits in tears. The Crones laugh, and Dell asks if that is all they can do.

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[5] If one wished to continue the Greek tragedy reference, the friend character (which Dell represents here) can be likened to the friend who returns with Orestes in the Euripedes version of The House of Atreus.

[6] Often these characters provide simple exposition, as Bernice and Ralph Henry do in Bus Riley's Back In Town or as Razz and Helen do in Where's Daddy?

CRONE 1 Might as well laugh as to cry, Mister.
CRONE 2 Cause if you ever get started crying, you'll never stop.
(Short Plays 117)

At that point one of the Crones spots Clara in the distance and announces the entrance of "Miss La-De-Da!" (Short Plays 117). Clara upbraids the crones and is obviously less than delighted to see Barney, who approaches her very respectfully. She accuses him of breaking out of the hospital, but both Barney and Dell assure her that ". . . The doctors told 'im he's okay. He still has to take it easy for a while, but he's okay" (Short Plays 117). She tells Barney it is all over between them. He begs her to listen to him, telling her "I got real love in my heart, Clara. . . it's a wonderful thing, real love. I know that now. There's nothin' in the world like it" (Short Plays 118). Her response is "Crap!" (Short Plays 118). Barney persists in spite of her animosity:

> But you don't understand. I tell you what it's like. It's like you'd spent all your life, livin' in one room, with the door closed, not knowin' that the door opened into another room, bigger, that looked out onto a beautiful view of the entire world. That's what real love is like, Clara. (Short Plays 118-119)

To make him understand, Clara resorts to kicking Barney in the groin and slapping him viciously. Barney crumbles, "cringing like a big, hearty dog that is punished for being too affectionate" (Short Plays 119). Dell calls for him to "Fight back" (Short Plays 119), but Barney remains squatting on the stage: "I can't fight. . . a man in love, Dell, has got no fight" (Short Plays 120).

Clara remains as if waiting for someone, and the girl returns to the sailor. Crone 1 is "transfixed by the scene of the sailor and his girl", saying: "Oh, God, Sister, remember the days we had love?" (Short Plays 120). The young lovers resolve to remain with each other as long as they can and sit together on a bench oblivious to everything else. Clara's sharply dressed date arrives and she leaves with him. Barney whimpers from the ground, "Where is there someone who can take my love? Where is there someone who can bear it?" (Short Plays 121). The crones cackle as the two matrons reappear, stopping to get their wind.

MATRON 1 *(Apprehensive)* Oh, goodness! Let's not stay here.
MATRON 2 No. This is no place for us. *(They trot off together.)*
(Short Plays 121)

There is no place for the middle class, for the middle-aged, for those who are still struggling with love. Barney's destruction has demonstrated that. So what remains for him? Inge never hints at it. He is content to leave the young lovers in each other's arms, to leave aggressive Clara and her lover of only a few acquaintances on their way to a tryst. There is very little expectation of a happy ending. Clara will probably go from man to man; the lovers will part before morning. Whether they have consummated their love or not, they will part. Barney is devastated, the matrons are on a treadmill they won't get off, and the crones will fade even further into the scenery. What is lacking here is the element of "hope".

Throughout his career, William Inge dealt with the theme of love in many of its variations. In "The Mall" we are treated to variations of the characters he presented in various incarnations throughout the life span of an individual.

A chart of the major and minor characters in Inge's one-act plays, ranked simply in order of chronological age, breaks down as follows:

	MALE		FEMALE	
	Major	Minor	Major	Minor
Children	1	0	3	0
Youth	5	4	2	3
Young Adult	5	1	6	0
Middle Age	3	0	7	0
Mature	5	3	3	0
Elderly	2	0	3	0

Although none appear in "The Mall", Inge began his exploration with children and continued his explorations through adolescence, when the psyche is bordering on the differences between affection and desire; through young love in its first, second and third variations; to married couples young and middle and simply, aged; to an exploration of what ultimately occurs to us when we reach that time of life when there is little to do but sit quietly in a chair waiting to pass into some other realm of existence.

It is difficult to define "love" as Inge saw it; his view became more and more cynical as time passed. The hope which keeps many of us alive from one encounter to another became dimmer and dimmer as he progressed through the continuum of his dramatic work. Presented as it is here in "The Mall", we see a

glimmer of hope for the sailor and his girl, although little can really happen between the end of the play and the next morning which will ensure that they can remain together . But we may hope that this night will strengthen the bond to the point that they will agree to meet again in one year, when he returns and she is of age and they can go on with this night of innocent and honest "oneness" for a lifetime together. Of course, he could be killed, he may fall for someone else; so may she, or her parents may forbid the union. But since all is speculation, we may also hope for the best. For the matrons, the hope is a matter of running on the spot to maintain the status quo; a constant jogging through the rat-race to obtain security in old age which is, at worst, society's most comfortable substitute for hope. A major problem in Inge's work is that few of Inge's "settled" characters over forty seem to escape from this aspect of compromise. Even more important than the actual compromise itself is the way each character chooses to rationalize it and how it ultimately influences their views of themselves. Barney's Clara will explore some variation of this with her temporary relationships until she either settles for security or chooses her own method of self-destruction. Del is tied too closely to Barney to really fit anywhere on the continuum of romantic love, but Inge's continuum does not restrict itself to consummatable relationships. In his lexicon, love is acceptable as variations of friendship and hero-worship and unrequited longings for companionship as well as for physical consummation. Dell's affection and caring for Barney probably demonstrate the purest motives on the stage in this play, but they are never enough for one part of the partnership. Here, Barney needs more, he remembers more from Clara, and has returned after great traumas of anguish and medical rehabilitation to seek a consummation of early promise. Denied his heart's desire, he has nowhere to go and is left wailing in his personal grief until he can deal with the pain in some way.

Because Inge does not reveal to us his choice for Barney, because we do not really know if Barney will wail for a month or a year before he takes control of his life, or if he will return to the state of mind that drove him into the hospital earlier, or if he will ultimately take his own life, there remains an element of hope in that very "not knowing". It could be positive. If there is a thesis here, it may well be in that phrase: so long as audiences could believe that some element of hope, some positive outcome could result from the plays he wrote, Inge enjoyed successes. When hope became impossible, unbelievable or downright false, the success of the plays dwindled. Perhaps, in the final analysis, the realism in his

characters worked against him because we find it very difficult to accept that any life which we see as real, as parallel in its reality to our own, can end in the kind of despair and anguish that we anticipate for Barney in "The Mall". The Crones stand at this other end of Inge's continuum. They are literally from his stage description fading into the wood-work, into the scenery, into the background of the world around the real characters, who are still struggling either successfully or unsuccessfully with the ultimate question of life, as William Inge interprets it for us: What do we do with our love?

Because Inge composed several short plays at the same time as he was writing his major successes, it will be advantageous to discuss them in relation to the themes and character-types we have already isolated from "The Mall". Eleven of these plays remain, and they shall be discussed in order of the position on Inge's love continuum on which their major "love interest" falls; in other words, from childhood to old age, or as Inge defined it, from innocence to despair.

"The Rainy Afternoon"

Inge wrote one short play with a cast made up entirely of children. There are three of them: one boy and two girls in "The Rainy Afternoon".

> *Of the two girls, Wilma is the older and more aggressive. She is perhaps ten. Billie Mae is only seven or eight. She plays the game. . . having tea. . . with some uncertainty, as though she were depending on Wilma for instruction. Both girls have their dolls beside them, treating the dolls like children.*
> WILMA You've got to spank your baby to make her behave.
> BILLIE MAE Mine's behaving.
> WILMA No she isn't. She's crying all the time. Spank her. I spank mine all the time. See? *(Wilma demonstrates)*
> BILLIE MAE Mine isn't crying.
> WILMA She is too. Spank her!
> BILLIE MAE Well, all right! *(Timidly she spanks her doll.)*
> (Short Plays 99)

Wilma conducts the tea-party with constant references to her social superiority, seasoning her conversation with references to doings at the country club, to which the other "mother" does not belong. Vic Bates arrives on his bicycle seeking shelter in the barn from the rainstorm outside. He is Wilma's age and is soon persuaded to join their game, which changes to a variation of "house" in which Wilma is the wife and mother of Billie Mae, and Vic is her "Hubby-dear".

Wilma assures the others that: "We just act like grown-ups. I know everything grown-ups do. I've watched my mother and daddy. I know everything they do" (Short Plays 101).

When "Hubby-dear" arrives from work, because dinner is not quite ready he has time to spank "Baby" for her bad behavior. Billie Mae reacts angrily to Vic's half-hearted spanking and is relegated to the role of "Maid" during dinner. Immediately afterwards, the "Maid" must do the dishes and the "Baby" must go to bed. Wilma and Vic each kiss Billie Mae goodnight and then:

> WILMA Come on, Hubby dear.
> VIC *(He is not acting now)* Well. . . what do we do?
> WILMA Our bedroom is in the hayloft. We'll go up there and leave Baby down here. *(She is completely self possessed.)*

Wilma leads a reluctant and gently protesting Vic up into the hayloft.

> WILMA If you don't follow me in two minutes, you're the biggest scaredy-cat that ever lived. So there. *(Continues up the stairs.)*
> VIC Shut up, will ya? I'm comin'. (Short Plays 104)

Billie Mae tries to talk to them, to persuade them to come down. She accuses them of doing something wrong but gets no answer even when she dissolves into tears. Finally she runs out into the rain. Inge completes the play with the stage direction:

> *(The stage is empty now. There are several moments of absolute and mysterious silence.)* (Short Plays 106)

In that silence some innocence is lost. The gentle satire of children playing at being adults and the social commentaries on class awareness and domestic habits and role expectations become harsher in the light of the final eerie stage direction which leaves us with an ominous feeling about this early experiment that is going on in the loft. In Wilma's bossiness and pseudo-concern with trivial matters of status and the country club set, we see the same kind of comment about the American Matron that will emerge in Albee's The American Dream and The Sandbox. This American "Mommy" is the aggressor in all matters, from domestic through sexual, and she will be obeyed by her children, her servants (who are one and the same in this play) and by her mate. She is a kind of "Mommy Dearest" complete with a "Hubby-dear". The dialogue is direct

and quite amazing in that it works so well on both the level of children at play and on a more adult (or at least more "grown-up") level as well.

The fears of childhood are best mirrored here in Billie Mae, who will do anything to please, to be included. Vic, too, can be manipulated by a stronger will. He does not really want to play house but is easily persuaded because it is raining. When he later protests that he doesn't want to climb to the loft, that he will go for a walk instead, he is re-directed by Wilma's reminder: "You can't. It's raining outside" (Short Plays 104). Billie Mae is very innocent, and we see twice that Vic is reluctant to hurt her or is drawn to her sincerity and gentleness. But he is easily persuaded to abandon her and to follow Wilma, who offers the promise of what grown-ups do and threatens him with exposure as a "scaredy-cat" (Short Plays 105) if he doesn't comply. We will see this quality in many of Inge's males on the pages which follow.

"The Strains of Triumph"

In "The Strains of Triumph," Inge explores young adults and their relationships. Ann, Tom and Ben form the triangle in this play; two boys and a girl this time. There are two other young males (identified as First Athlete and Second Athlete) who appear as part of the revelation of the plot. The final character is identified simply as "Old Man".

Inge lays the scene "at the side of a small hillock behind which lies an open field. An old man, bent over his cane, comes walking onto the scene drawn by the music and voices " (Short Plays 132) of a college athletic event in the distance. Ann (19) comes running, laughing onto the scene.

> *. . . following fast behind her is Tom, a young athlete dressed in gray sweat suit and track shoes provided by his college. He catches up with Ann, grabs her in his arms and kisses her. Then they laugh lovingly together.* (Short Plays 132)

Ann is afraid of being observed by the Old Man; Tom "proclaims loudly. . . Look everybody! I'm kissing Ann. Ann and I are in love. I'm kissing her. See?. . . Now I've told the whole world, and the whole world may be watching" (Short Plays 132-133). Ann is afraid that Ben might see them, and even though she readily admits that she loves Tom, she has been seeing Ben and is afraid of his reaction.

ANN . . . Ben and I grew up together. I know how deeply he feels things, much more than he shows.

TOM I've had my feelings hurt, fer crying out loud! Before I came to college, I was nuts about a girl in high school, and she gave me the air. Yah! For a long time after that, I couldn't eat, I couldn't study, I didn't wanta see anyone. But I got over it. I learned to take it. It's just part of growing up. (Short Plays 133)

Later Tom rhapsodizes about love: ". . . It's a magical process. . . One day, two people are separate individuals, each going his own way; on another day they meet and fall in love, and they become like one" (Short Plays 134).

They run off together, and Ben emerges from behind the hillock,

> *. . . where he stands for a few moments watching Ann and Tom disappear. One must get the feeling that he has been watching them and knows in his heart what has happened. First there is a look of intense anguish on his face, and he stands rigid with bitterness and rage. Then gradually the intensity subsides, and his features and his body relax into sad resignation.* (Short Plays 134)

Ben lets himself fall to the ground, and the old man turns to ask: "Have you been hurt?" (Short Plays 134).

When Ben finally allows himself to be approached, the old man introduces himself as Professor Benoit, Associate Professor in the Department of Ancient Languages. He proceeds to render a monologue which proves him worthy of his post:

OLD MAN . . . I was studious even as a child. . . . So I made myself content to watch and not participate. I suppose all people are divided into two groups, those who participate and those who watch and observe. Once I was in love, and it terrified me. . . . The reality of her seemed too much for me to bear, and I fled. I could not accept the responsibility of loving her. (Short Plays 136)

Ben is sought out by two athletes who have come to get him for his event. He refuses to participate, and they leave in anger. When Ann and Tom appear to request the same, the issue of their love surfaces. Ben sends them away. They go, begging him not to hate them. Ben collapses to the ground in tears.

OLD MAN Young man. . . *(Ben does not move)* you mustn't let yourself feel so deeply.

BEN Now I know why people go mad and kill. (Short Plays 140)

The Old Man invites Ben to join him to watch the race.

> BEN I've always played in the games, I feel humiliated just to stand and watch.
> OLD MAN Oh come now. One doesn't have to run in the races to enjoy them. . . Up here, you can see them all, and the view gives them perspective. Isn't it a magnificent sight? . . . It's beautiful isn't it? And exciting? (Short Plays 141)

Ben agrees, and they continue to watch the competition from the hillock.

There is a strong sense of conflict of interests here in the sharp contrast between Ben's rage at the losses he feels and the various band-aids he is offered in the philosophies of the other characters. Ben has lost the girl he loves to a good friend, and he feels very deeply betrayed and abandoned. His responses are immediate and reactionary. He abandons his own plans for the competition, rages at his friends, and insults the Old Man. He has a strong need to be alone with his rage and his grief. The old man's comments hardly serve to relieve the tensions we see in the young man, but Inge ends the play on this positive note, that some must be content only to stand and watch. There is a kind of compromise here that does not quite ring true. The opening elation between the young lovers, on the other hand, easily convinces us, and the same kind of youthful exuberance directed in a positive, acceptable way is heartening. The sentiment that one should be allowed to share the joy of love with the whole world but hide the despair of rejection provides a kind of double message that makes the play less effective than some of his others.

This is the first time that we actually see this side of Inge's philosophy, the side which requires acceptance of our lot, that advocates being satisfied with what we find in life, and that encourages us to be as content with watching life as we would be with living it. Why should Ben be content to let his life go because Ann prefers another boy? Why do some people have to content themselves with simply standing and watching? And who determines the members of these two teams.? The answers are not to be found in the platitudes of a professor of Ancient Languages. Surely Inge cannot mean that we are to listen to his soothing suggestions; that youth should pattern itself after that part of age that chooses to stand and watch? There is hope here, of course, for everyone. The athletes will find someone else to enter the event that Ben abandons; Ann and Tom may indeed continue in the initial bliss they describe so eloquently in their opening scene (Tom does win his race while Ben watches from the hillock); The

Old Man will continue blissfully watching life go by and teaching other ancient languages to his students and Ben may. . . what? What is left for Ben? Will he become another Professor Benoit? Will he content himself with what life will allow him rather than go out seeking what he needs to truly participate in the journey? Or will he ". . . go mad and kill"? And kill whom? While he rages against the lovers and waits for the beginning of Tom's race, Ben calls out ". . . I won't hate you, Tom. I won't hate you" (Short Plays 140). At that point the starting gun fires to announce the beginning of the race. If Ben won't hate Tom, then who will receive the gun-shot of his hatred? When Ben returns to watch the race being run, he renders the name "Tom" in a weak voice as if he were missing the companion more than the girlfriend.

"A Social Event"

The next play is a clever little pastiche, a comedy of manners played around one joke. "A Social Event" centres on the problems of two young movie stars, Randy Brooks and Carole Mason, who are married to each other. They are desperately trying to arrange over the phone for invitations to what promises to be the social event of the Hollywood year, the funeral of a well-known actor. Anyone who is anyone will be there, and they must be there and be seen by anyone who is anyone. A great deal of the dialogue centres on off-stage characters who will be attending the event or who may be able to get them an invitation. The device of telephone calls provides interesting contrasts to the anxiety in the bedroom itself. Their black maid, Muriel, is kept busy tidying, fetching and clearing for the frustrated young couple, who never actually discuss their own relationship at all. Finally, when she can get a word in, Muriel requests time off to attend the funeral herself. Her mother, it seems, was the dead actor's housekeeper, so that she will have to accompany her mother to the house after the ceremony to be with "the family". Of course, Randy and Carole insist on driving their servant to the actual funeral and call to cancel all appointments so that they can also accompany her to the home of the deceased afterwards:

> CAROLE . . . And we feel that we should take her with us, and then, of course, we'll have to go to the home afterwards. Just family and a few of his very closest friends. We can't get out of it. . . you'll forgive us, won't you darling?. . .
> RANDY *(To himself, while dressing)* I guess it'll look all right. After all, funerals are very democratic affairs. (Short Plays 35)

Inge loved movies and movie stars and collected many photos as he was growing up. He writes about the professional "starlets" of this play with wit and a flair for the jargon of glitter. The relationship between the married couple is a business arrangement first. They dove-tail each other's schemes and decisions like board members at AT&T. Everything is a little hyper and a little erratic and quite, quite desperate. Inge cleverly inserts his barbs about American class consciousness and the colour bar to prompt our grins rather than to enlist our participation in a freedom march. The love Muriel displays for her family and for the grief of the people her mother worked for while she was growing up is dignified and simple. It is a fact; it needs no explanations or consultations before it can be released. She is a breath of fresh air in this atmosphere where everything is announced as if it were being tested for an impending press conference. In Inge's continuum of love, these two would be defined as "young marrieds". If marriage can be measured by calm civility, Carole and Randy are the only successful married couple in Inge's cannon; but their marriage works because it is a business arrangement; love has very little to do with it. Carole and Randy are being ridiculed. It is ironic that the one "working marriage" in Inge's plays is located within a satire of pretension and social climbing in America's dream factory. In many ways the play is a pure fantasy about Hollywood, one of the playwright's favourite escape fantasies. As such it stands apart from most of his work.

"Bus Riley's Back in Town"

"Bus Riley's Back in Town" introduces a setting, plot and characters to which Inge returned on several occasions: there are strong echoes of it in the later one-act "Glory in the Flower" and of both of these in the screen-play for Splendor in the Grass. One of Inge's final films was given the same title, although after disagreements and litigations Inge was successful in having his name taken from the screen credits. In this version of the play we see the development of certain theatrical conventions that Inge eventually grew away from or at least came to handle more effectively. The Salesman (Harry) and the bartender (Howie) are one shade above exposition spouters, those characters whose life on the stage is limited to providing background information before the entrance of the leading characters. Between them and the heroine's friends,

Bernice and Ralph Henry, the whole sordid tale about Bus Riley's high-school affair with Jackie Loomis comes out. Bus, a Mexican-American, was sent to a reform school, and Jackie had an abortion, both at the insistence of Jackie's politically powerful father, Del Loomis. If Howie and Harry are one shade above exposition, Ralph and Bernice are one step above dress extras. What is especially intriguing about this play is that one of the most interesting characters never appears on stage, but almost everyone speaks of him, and his influence is present in all their lives. This is Jackie's father, who looms large above the characters in "Bus Riley's Back in Town." The leading characters are the former lovers, Jackie (23-24) who has ". . . something taut about her, a breathlessness that makes her seem to live every moment as though it were a crisis . . ." (Short Plays 80); and Bus Riley, whose black hair and dark good looks contrast with his navy whites. Bus is back in town to visit his father, who may be dying. He has been here for several days, and Jackie has been trying to contact him. They meet finally in the Fiesta Room of the Hotel Boomerang in a small town in middle Texas.

Jackie's friends try to protect her from a meeting with Bus, but she is determined and tricks them so that she can return later to be with him. Bus is not as eager to see Jackie as she is to renew the acquaintance. He actually inquires about other girls he used to date and discovers they have all moved on. When they dance together Jackie reminds him of their earlier romance:

> JACKIE Remember how shy we were of each other for so long?
> BUS Yah, I remember.
> JACKIE You used to walk me home from school in the afternoon, and we'd sit together on my doorstep for hours, and not say a word.
> BUS *(Obviously not giving himself to the recall)* Sure, sure.
> JACKIE And the first time you kissed me. Oh, I'll never forget. Remember how scared we were when we made love, feeling so guilty and afraid. You used to tell me I was like some wonderful princess.
> BUS I'd forgotten I was so corny.
> JACKIE But we really felt those things, Bus. And when you really feel them, they're not corny. . . . (Short Plays 91)

Bus suggests that they travel to the next town where they can get hard liquor and a motel room for the night. She is offended, hurt that he sees her as just any woman. She leaves, only to return a few minutes later having decided that his suggestion is better than no time together at all.

BUS Love to me, is something they put you in jail for.
JACKIE A doctor at the hospital told me. . . I was too sentimental about things.
BUS I'm in this business now strictly for kicks, Doll.
JACKIE I'll be. . . just an ordinary girl. . . you happened to pick up. . . and we'll throw a ball.
BUS That's it, Doll. *(He grabs her to him hungrily and presses a sensual kiss against her lips. The music from the juke-box makes a mocking accompaniment . . . .)* (Short Plays 94-95)

The disillusion and cynicism of Bus Riley as a character were to surface in many of Inge's males throughout the years. Their initial experience with love had produced a souring effect, and, despite the fact they might crave sex after that time, they would be careful not to confuse it with love. Bus is not portrayed here as a villain, just as a man who has been frightened off, someone for whom Love is something to be jailed over. He is still attracted to Jackie, but he will not allow himself to give rein to the feelings she is happy to recount. Jackie is also a miniature of several of Inge's later heroines. She is still young and attractive, but she has been wounded in some way. She, however, does not give in to an easy bitterness; her memories of the experience of love foster within her a desire to repeat the experience and to try yet again for the brass ring of happiness and fulfillment despite the initially bad experience.

There is a reminiscence of Vic Bates from the children's play "The Rainy Afternoon" in Bus' reaction. Vic's first experience is one that he was lured into; Bus went to jail after the first sexual encounter he enjoyed. The lines which Jackie recalls from their first period together are also reminiscent of the scene in "The Mall" between the sailor and his girl: young love is sometimes so holy a thing that the couple are content to simply sit holding each other for a long time. Such feelings can, of course, boomerang if they are held to be too precious, and years later in a bar called Boomerang they can return to haunt Jackie with the poignancy of their memory in view of the reality of the situation and of a partner's memories.

"People in the Wind"

Like "Bus Riley's Back In Town", "People in the Wind" was used as the basis for other works. Those familiar with the play Bus Stop will easily recognize

the germ of it in the characters and themes of this one-act. This play presents several versions of the love motif, featuring several parts of the continuum explored in "The Mall" and, like that play, putting them all on the stage simultaneously. Two waitresses in a small country town in Kansas are waiting for the Greyhound bus to stop on its way from Kansas City to Wichita. Elma is a school girl, a virgin and a romantic. She could easily be the girl in "The Mall" before she met the sailor or Jackie Loomis from "Bus Riley. . ." before she began her infatuation with the handsome Bus. Grace "is a more seasoned character in her thirties." Grace is the first example of a character we will find many times in Inge's plays, the middle-aged spinster who has seen it all and still intends to enjoy her life. When the bus pulls in we will meet the driver, a fairly stock middle-aged man with a sense of humor and a penchant for exposition about his passengers; Old Lady 1 and Old Lady 2, who are the direct opposites of Crone 1 and Crone 2 from "The Mall" but who are just as judgmental as those choric ladies were to be; and a Drunk in the form of a Ph. D from Harvard who wrote his thesis under Kittredge. The love team here are also on the bus, and Inge simply identifies them as Man and Girl. They are the prototypes of Bo and Cherie from the later play.

The Girl introduces herself immediately upon her entrance:

> GIRL *(Displaying a slightly shabby pretentiousness)* I'm a singer. I sang at a very exclusive night club there. Our patrons were some of the wealthiest people in Kansas City. I'm on my way to Hollywood now. One of my admirers is a very important man and he has arranged for me to have a screen test, so I am on my way to Hollywood. (Short Plays 18)

The Man follows her soon after: "He is a big man, probably nearing thirty. It is hard to say whether he is actually good-looking or whether the rugged outdoor character of his person merely gives him a semblance of good looks" (Short Plays 20). When the Bus Driver identifies The Man as "a bad one", Grace is quick to reply with a wise smile, "Nothin' wrong with him a few lovin' words wouldn't cure" (Short Plays 20). Grace has an innate sense of what people need; she is one of the common Mid-Western characters that early endeared Inge to audiences. When the Drunk bemoans his fate of being fired from his job teaching at a college, she advises him:

> GRACE All you need is just to lay off the stuff, mister.

DRUNK I've always been a very proud man. After all, a man should be proud, don't you agree? I loved her very much but I wasn't going to let her know she hurt me. If she didn't have the wisdom and the upbringing to realize my own innate superiority to other suitors, then who was I to humiliate and degrade myself by telling her how very much I cared? (Short Plays 23)

His thesis was an analysis of the love element in Shakespeare's plays, and he could find much of it in this diner if he were sober enough to see it.

The Man tries to persuade The Girl to get back on the bus and travel with him to Wichita and after that to his small ranch. He has been smitten by her, and something about her behavior has convinced him to pursue her:

MAN Who you foolin'?
GIRL I'm not fooling anybody.
MAN You're foolin' yourself. That's who you're foolin'.. . . *(whispering softly in her ear)* I'll not forget how cute you looked in that night-club place, singin' your cute songs. . . .and I'm not gonna forget. . . back there on the bus. . . before you got mad. . . how you kissed me. . . sweet and soft.
GIRL I don't know what made me do it.
MAN I ain't ever been kissed like that before.
GIRL *(Torn between desire and confusion)* Don't. Please go away. Lemme alone. (Short Plays 24)

He has set his sights on the first girl who has touched his heart, and he is ready to marry her and take her to his home and cherish her there. Perhaps there is some kind of guarantee in that sort of relationship. We are left with the hope that his naive innocent enthusiasm will be enough to guide them both into a life of mutual happiness. In this version of the plot, he returns to the bus promising to marry her if she accompanies him. She is allowed to make her own choice, and she deliberates until the bus is nearly ready to leave before joining him. The Old Ladies provide a kind of background muzack which counterpoints the long silences between the lovers.

Inge was to realize the possibilities for this kind of ensemble piece much more fully in the longer play Bus Stop. The Drunk is a fascinating experiment unrealized. All the components are present, but Inge follows through on none of them. His poetry is spouted into the air aimlessly and makes little comment on the situations which surround him. The girl seems tainted by her own ambitions and limited by her own ignorance and dreams. Here we strongly feel the Man is probably her best hope for happiness, and we may question their motives, but we

certainly wish them the best when we realize she will reboard the bus to travel with him. The promise late in the act that his intentions are more honorable (at least in the traditional sense) than her expectations serves to tilt the balance in his favor.

> GIRL . . . With all this fine love talk, you seem to have overlooked one little thing; namely, the subject of gettin' a ring to put on my finger and hiring a man to tell us we're married.
> MAN *(Rather innocently)* Sure.
> GIRL Sure, What?
> MAN We'll get married. What kinda guy you think I am?
> GIRL *(Truthfully)* I don't know, mister. I honest don't know.
> (Short Plays 25)

In this play, (as opposed to Bus Stop which was to come), these characters are intended to be played as real people; there is no attempt to glamorize either of them. He is required to be rough first and good-looking afterwards, if at all; she is dressed in *"mainly fragments of finery from a sojourn in Kansas City"* (Short Plays 17). There is an innocent quality in their looks. Although they may have experimented with physical sex, neither of them seems to have been really touched by the emotion of love before this meeting.

"Glory in the Flower"

Essentially this is the same play as "Bus Riley's Back In Town". It is set in a bar in a small town in the Midwest. The two leading characters are Jackie and Bus, who have had an affair early in their adolescence and who meet again later to re-assess the relationship. The similarities and differences between the two couples are what make the most impact and provide the best information about where Inge was going with his characters. The bartender and the salesman (whose names are also the same in this play as in the earlier one) are much better-drawn characters. Their discussions about the changes in the town, the people and the general state of the economy provide a kind of chorus for the specific incidents we see developing before us. This bar, called Paradise, is not empty; a section has been divided off for teenagers to sit in booths and listen to a jukebox. On occasion they also smoke grass there when the bartender, Howie, isn't watching. The bar has a pseudo sea-shore motif and no longer features the Spanish motif of the earlier piece. Jackie's friends have been replaced by the teenagers, one of whom is called Joker. He is the same lively, sturdy youngster

that Inge used frequently to symbolize the promise of youth and the freedom of those years.[7]

Jackie and Bus are again the main focus of the play, and Inge keeps them within the confines of their earlier relationship and their reaction to it. Jackie:

> *. . .is a woman nearing forty, but pretty, with a clear, fair skin and a pleasing fullness about the body, and a sweet girlish smile that makes her attractive. Jackie has tried to keep her youthful looks and succeeded. . . . At this particular time perhaps she has tried too hard, for her dress is quite frilly and fussy, there are flowers in her hair, and a little too much make-up. Only her sweetness and her seeming naivete prevent her from seeming cheap.*[8]
>
> *Bus Riley is a handsome man of thirty-nine or forty, but still young-looking, with a boyish face that has become somewhat hard and bitter. His dress is sharp, rather dapper. His physique is powerful and finely proportioned, with broad shoulders and slim waist. His walk and his manner are a little arrogant, a little disdainful.* (Cerf 173)

Neither have the consequences of the earlier liaison been as serious. In this play, Jackie gave the child up for adoption (in "Bus Riley's Back In Town", she had sought an abortion), moved back to her hometown, over the passing years managed to live down the stigma of her youth, and is presently well respected as a music teacher to young children. Bus has lost his Mexican-American persona and is now a sometimes boxer, sometimes bit-player in movies. His dialogue is peppered with references to his contacts, his dinners at famous restaurants and his great success in the movie world.

A theme new to this version of the plot, but hardly to this playwright, is the concern for young people. Because Jackie and Bus are no longer young, the concern manifests itself for the teenagers. Howie says:

> Kids today beat me. Everyone of them kids in there knows more'n I knew when I was thirty. They throw orgies that'd surprise a Roman emperor, but they go home to their folks and their folks still wanta

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[7] It is interesting that Inge was never to write a play from the point-of-view of this young character. Joker and others like him in Inge's work served as the debut-roles of several of America's favorite young actors: Paul Newman played Alan in Picnic, Warren Beatty's debuts both on Broadway and in Hollywood were in Inge vehicles, and Hume Cronyn remembers playing opposite the impromptu shenanigans of James Dean in the live television production of this very play, "Glory in the Flower".

[8] Bennett Cerf, , and Van H. Cartmell (eds), Twenty-four Favorite One Act Plays (New York: Dolphin Books, 1958) 169.

> read 'em bedtime stories. I don't know what's gonna happen to 'em. They're all ambitious but they all wanta be movie stars or bandleaders or disc-jockeys. They're too good for plain, ordinary, everyday work. And what's gonna happen to us if everyone becomes a bandleader, I'd like to know. (Cerf 185-186)

Obviously this hasn't happened overnight, because Bus is the perfect example of the statement, twenty years after. The relationship between the youngsters and the other people of the bar are interesting in that they are not always the same. Jackie genuinely likes the younger people and laughs and jokes with them, even trying their new dances. They also seem to like her. Bus completely ignores the younger people, seeking his audience at the bar with Howie and Harry, the salesman. Howie disciplines Bronco, who is smoking marijuana, and Bronco complies with the older man's demands; he leaves the bar. He protests, but he leaves quietly. Clearly the generations treat each other with respect.

When Bus suggests to Jackie that they spend some time at a friend's house because his wife is away, Jackie is insulted. As in the earlier play, she leaves the bar only to return very quickly. However, this time she does not comply with his wishes. Instead she wishes him farewell, assures him there are no bad feelings and leaves the bar. In the doorway she passes on advice to Joker about what it takes to grow up. Then she drops the roses in her hair to the floor and leaves Bus to his boiler makers.

Jackie is our first encounter with a character Inge explored often: the person who arrests his or her life at some point in its progress and stands as still as possible for a number of years until brought up short by some re-encounter with the past, an encounter often sought quite openly. Barney in "The Mall" is such a character. Barney has been hospitalized and has been released as "recovered". He immediately returns to a woman who had given him the only moments of love with which he can identify. He seeks to make this remembrance permanent despite her rejection. Jackie, on the other hand, seems to come up against a similar problem and reacts in a very mature manner. She is dressed and made up to simulate her youth; she tells us she has been dreaming about this moment of reunion for years. She always sees herself in some reference to her former relationship with Bus. Once aware of his feelings, however, she is able to react very maturely. She ties off the relationship pleasantly, sheds her pretensions, and passes out of this teenager's version of "paradise" to rejoin her life. Jackie provides strong support for the "hope" motif. She has given up her

pretensions and abandoned her dream, but she has not found it necessary to induce any further pain because of it. The fact that she is able to verbalize exactly what is now required to make a success of the "grown-up life" is also a strong indication that there is some hope for her. Like Bronco, she has been able to leave the scene with dignity, refusing to conform to anyone else's morality, but respecting their right to make decisions too.

"An Incident at the Standish Arms"

In this four-page incident, Inge creates a disturbing study of entrapment. No characters have names. There is a Woman who has invited her taxi-driver up to her apartment for a mid-afternoon tryst (she is in negligee, he is fastening his clothes). After the bedroom encounter the play begins with her running into the living room and seeking "...a means for her disappearance" (Short Plays 125). She is ashamed, guilt-ridden, and actually begs him to leave. She is distracted and apologetic, but she cannot bring herself to display any humanity toward him now that the bedroom incident is over. The Man rages at her:

> MAN God damn you and your hypocrite ways! To hell with you and all your kind. You've made me feel cheap, God damn you! You've made me feel cheap! (Short Plays 127-128)

He leaves, and her twelve-year old daughter appears almost immediately, demanding that her mother contact the school and have her seat moved away from the girl who sits across the aisle.

> GIRL . . .She uses all sorts of filthy words, and she stinks because she never bathes and she wears ugly, dirty dresses . . . . (Short Plays 128)

Of course there is an obvious element of class to this theme, but there is something else as well, something which is much more important in our consideration of Inge's characters. Desire seems to exist side-by-side with the prejudice. The pretensions of polite existence demand a kind of payment through risk or exposure to the very traits one claims to abhor and conspicuously live without. The element of "forbidden fruit" is a strong part of this, but there is something more as well. The Woman's intense shame turns this incident into an obsession, a craving, a need over which she has less and less control. One of

Inge's shortest one-act plays, it leaves a more stunning effect than many of the longer ones.

Part of this fascination lies in the simple fact that Inge, a playwright who often devoted pages to character motivation and who seldom hesitated to provide a great deal of background information, chooses in this play to leave so many details unresolved. No names are given, no real evidence of who these people are, no clear indication of how wealthy the home is; none of the kind of information the reader usually receives and has come to expect. And yet, he is right to do so. One of the play's major effects lies in a refusal to clutter the reader's curiosity with meaningless detail as to how it could have happened. Likewise, the hints to the performers are equally sparse, providing genuine challenges for the actors.

"Memory of Summer"

The most interesting character here is Viola,

> *. . . a slim woman in her forties, with a delicate prettiness. There is a fragile smile on her face, a rather unrealistic smile that exists for itself.* (Short Plays 69)

The other two characters simply rebound off her reactions. They are Alice, *"...the old housekeeper"* and Coast Guard, a Joker clone, *". . . a young man of almost godlike handsomeness, still bronzed from the summer sun"* (Short Plays 71).

Another variation on Jackie from "Glory in the Flower", Viola seeks the attention and the friendship of the young coast guard, who has demanded that she not swim in waters that have become dangerous now that the season is over. She protests gently but does not wish to cause him any problems and promises to comply. Only later in the scene does Inge reveal that she is about to be fetched from Alice's cottage by her doctor, who plans to take her back to the city for consultations with another doctor. Viola allows herself to be cautioned and guided, but she seeks constantly to simply

> . . . look my best for the young people. I shall delight them with my stories, and I shall dance more gayly than any of them. And I shall wear my blue satin slippers, and my lovely furs, if the night air is at all chilly . . . . (Short Plays 75)

If this is truly another variation on the case of arrested development outlined above, then we can now see three distinct routes that such a personality can go in an Inge play. Jackie (from "Glory") makes peace with the past and moves into the future with no recriminations. She can only pattern her own life, she cannot change Bus, she can only advise Joker; the only real effect she can have is upon herself. Barney (in "The Mall") will destroy himself if his dreams of the past are not realized in the present. The terror for such characters is that they will permit themselves no future if others do not conform to their needs. Viola is a third variation; preferring to stay in the exact spot of her last contentment. The daily swim in the warm water followed by the happy hours dancing with the young people at the inn produced a pleasant summer. Now each day is patterned the same way despite the fact that the water is too cold for swimming and the inn is practically deserted; very few young people remain at this time of year. Their youth has passed her by, but Viola will be content to stay here and warm the embers of memory until some kind of change is enforced. It would not be hard to imagine her entering an institution and never emerging. Soon she may be in the same mental stage and situation no matter what her physical surroundings, although at this stage she is easily distracted by any hint of genuine human contact.

"The Boy in the Basement"

There are four particularly well-drawn characters in this two-scene one-act play. *"Spencer Scranton, a man nearing fifty, lives...with his father and mother using the house as a funeral parlor as well as a home"* (Short Plays 39). Mr. Scranton, the father, *"...is an ancient man, close to eighty, whose life for several years now has been confined to [a] chair, where he sits like a discarded bridegroom, his only activity looking out of the bay window onto the little bit of world before him"* (Short Plays 39). Mrs. Scranton, the mother, *"is a regal-looking woman in her early seventies, still very alert and active"* (Short Plays 40). Joker Evans is the grocery delivery boy, *". . . about eighteen, handsome, husky, full of quick life and humor. There seems to be a spirit of real camaraderie between him and Spencer"* (Short Plays 43).

Almost all of Inge's handsome young men are cut from the same mould. They are "handsome, husky, full of quick life and humor." As we have seen, several of them are called Joker. Often, Inge is content to leave them as symbols

with few lines; simply as representatives of beautiful youth. In this play the boy is established in the first scene as perhaps the only relationship Spencer has that borders on friendship. In the second scene, he is carried in by two walk-on characters who deliver his drowned body to the basement for Spencer to embalm. This is the first youthful sacrifice that we have seen in Inge's plays, unless we include Vic's rite of passage in "The Rainy Afternoon".

Spencer is the first obviously homosexual character we have seen in these one-act plays. When his mother discovers that there has been a raid on a gay establishment in the neighboring city, she remembers having seen a book of matches from the offending Hi Ho Bar in her son's possession and confronts him:

> MRS. SCRANTON You got them when you went there last Saturday night, and the place was raided, and you called me for two hundred dollars to pay the policeman to keep him from putting you in jail and to keep your name out of the paper *(Her detective work has thoroughly shattered Spencer's nerves. He can no longer look at her. He cannot even speak. His incoherent grunts give him a moment's resemblance to his father's mumbling inarticulateness.)* And the police raided the place, because it's a meeting place for degenerates. *(Spencer collapses over the table, his head in his arms. Mrs. Scranton now has the bearing of a tragic victor.)* Dear God, my own son! My own flesh and blood! Corrupting himself in low degeneracy. Going to some disgusting saloon, where men meet other men and join together in. . . in some form of . . . of lewd depravity. . . . " (Short Plays 48)

The centre of the play is this section at the end of scene one when the mother renders an aria of guilt and remorse while Spencer gathers a few things together in preparation to leave for ever:

> MRS. SCRANTON . . . I've loved my son since the day he was born and kept him to my breast with loving care. I think I even loved him more than I loved my husband, for my son's infant love was innocent and pure, and demanded no fleshly act to satisfy its need. O God, will you punish me forever? I who have fought so hard for the right! Have fought so hard to keep my mind and heart and body pure and free from all physical craving. All my life, I've been a God-fearing woman. . . .When was the day I did wrong? Dear God, when was the day I did wrong? . . .
>
> SPENCER I should have left here a long time ago, but I didn't. I just stayed on, and on, and on. But I'm going now. Never

you fear. And it'll be a cold day in hell before I ever come back. (Short Plays 48-49)

The mother and son argument blazes for over a page, Mrs. Scranton begging him to stay despite her earlier comments and Spencer becoming more and more determined to leave, which he does at the end of the first scene, which concludes with a final mention of Spencer's invalid father, who heard the whole tirade in silence:

> *. . . Mr. Scranton has not moved throughout the scene but has continued staring out the window like a piece of patient wreckage.* (Short Plays 50)

Inge deals once more with a case of arrested development? Spencer, whose only friend at age forty-six has been an eighteen-year-old boy, is going to try like Jackie to move out into his own present and construct a future. When the curtain rises on scene two, he is returning the next morning, his resolve having lasted only part of one night. The ties that bind him to his mother are every bit as strong for him as she has already outlined they are for her. The final incidents of the play are particularly well written, but they are almost anti-climactic in that Spencer's life is over when he decides to return to this home. After embalming his young friend, Joker, he will settle down himself to much the same existence as his father endures.

Joker's short scene is very effective, and we share his energy and delight in the hopes he has for medical school. We see him as a strong presence who could probably accept Spencer for what he is as long as their relationship did not change. To see his lifeless body carried into the embalming room, and later to watch as Spencer works, dashes any hope we had for these characters:

> *(. . . Spencer now picks up one of the boy's hands and kisses it warmly.)*
> SPENCER Jesus Christ, Joker, I wanted you to live. *(Now he takes his scalpel. It is the hardest thing he ever had to do in his life, and he has to steel himself to do it, but he severs the main arteries, feeling the pain of doing it to himself, and then drops to a chair, his perspiring face in his hands).* (Short Plays 54)

Joker was the most hopeful; he is dead. Mr. Scranton has been a living corpse throughout, underlining his pointless existence by guttural sounds which only Spencer can interpret. Spencer is dead too; Inge himself says so with the line: ".

. . feeling the pain of doing it to himself. . ." (Short Plays 54). The only possibility for hope here is in the character of the mother who has decided that: ". . . we're going to try to treat each other nicer now, aren't we? To speak to each other with a little more consideration" (Short Plays 51). Somehow the compromises we have already seen in the play give us little hope for better in Spencer's future.

By ". . . treat each other nicer now", Mrs. Scranton is establishing the rules of future existence. By his silence, by his very return, Spencer has accepted this entrapment, severing himself from his own life as surely as he severs the arteries of the young corpse downstairs and seating himself unintelligibly in his father's place by the window, watching the real world only at great distance. In Mrs. Scranton we hear an echo of the problem faced by The Woman in "Incident at The Standish Arms" in that she had enormous problems with the physical side of her marriage, in the end loving her son more than her husband because the boy's demands were purer. Whether Inge expects us to accept this as the basis for Spencer's sexual preferences is not clear. Are we to assume that because he knew his mother's love was pure, he had to keep that kind of love always pure in his mind? Therefore, the only outlet for his natural sexual releases would have to be other men. Whatever its effect on Spencer, it has certainly been a driving force in his mother's life. Many of Inge's characters have similar dichotomous relationships with the sexual act.[9] And it leaves most of them with a yearning for the past or with a great sense of guilt about themselves and their relationships. Neither reaction is particularly conducive to the promotion of "hope" for the characters involved.

Of course, in all of these plays, in every consideration of hope and the theatre, there is the matter of catharsis. Can we as audience and readers gain a little more insight into ourselves from what Inge explores? If we can, then the very act of thinking "there but for the grace of God, go I" can be an implied hope in the drama. If there is that aspect of hope in this play, it has to be in our realization that you cannot go back again. After Spencer made the decision to leave, he had nothing to gain by returning.

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[9] In Come Back, Little Sheba, Doc feels he sullied Lola by making love before marriage; Lila in A Loss of Roses comes to see lovemaking as a surrender of herself, not as a sharing. In that same play, Kenny shows us the son's side of this mother-child relationship.

"The Tiny Closet"

Mr. Newbold may be another homosexual, although that is not specifically stated, nor actually implied. He lives in a rooming house and has a small closet in his room for which he demands the only key. The anxiety occasioned by his fear that someone (the maid or the landlady, Mrs. Crosby) will violate his privacy defines Mr. Newbold's character. He is a private man, requiring, as he says, very little:

> MR. NEWBOLD Mrs. Crosby, a closet is a very small space. That's all I ask in this life. That's all I ask, just that tiny closet to call my own, my very own. (Short Plays 59)

Mrs. Crosby as the owner of the house has her rights too. As she puts it to her nosey neighbor, Mrs. Hergesheimer:

> That's what I've been telling myself, Mrs. Hergesheimer. I've got every right. For all I know, I may be harboring a spy, or a criminal, or a lunatic. What's he got in that closet that he don't want anyone to see? Can you tell me? It must be something he's ashamed of, or he wouldn't mind if anyone saw. Isn't that what you say? And if it's something he's ashamed of, I think we should find out what it is. You can't tell, he might have a bomb in there he meant to destroy us with. I'm not gonna set idly by while someone is plotting something, Mrs. Hergesheimer. I pride myself, I'm a real American, and I say, if anyone's got any secrets he wants to keep hid, let 'em come out into the open and declare himself. Mr. Newbold has always seemed like a fine man, and I got nothin' against him personally and he's the best roomer I ever had, keeps his room spotless. Elsie don't have to do anything but make the bed. And I appreciate that, but if you ask me; it's kinda unnatural for a man to be so tidy. Isn't that what you say? There's been something suspicious about him from the very first. (Short Plays 61-62)

Although both Mr. Newbold and Mrs Crosby are certainly realized characters, the play appears to be more about theme than about character. Elsie, the maid, provides little more than exposition and an opinion about busy-bodies (she has little use for them). Mrs. Hergesheimer is a foil for Mrs. Crosby, and together they form a duo of amateur detectives on a quest to expose the mystery of the closet. The discussion of what rights does an individual hold to privacy if he is endangering or influencing no one but himself is still a timely one, and the idea of the play harks us back to McCarthyism and countless debates about the Bill of Rights.

What of "hope"? Mr. Newbold is very suspicious as the play opens, and he is not afraid to voice his anxieties. Mrs. Crosby backs right down and assures him that no one is tampering with the lock on his closet, that no one in her house has the slightest interest in his private affairs. When he leaves, and she calls her neighbor to help her unlock the closet, it is a little surprising that Mr. Newbold sneaks into the house again while they are rifling through his room. He has backbone; he is willing to follow through on his hunches and to surprise the culprits in the act. There is hope that this mild-mannered gentleman will actually stand up for his rights. However, when the secret of the closet is revealed, Mr. Newbold does not reveal his hiding place and simply listens quietly to the women discussing his secret:

> MRS. CROSBY . . . I'd rather be harboring a Communist than a man who makes hats.
> MRS. HERGESHEIMER Why there's nothing wrong with making hats. I don't see anything wrong with it. Why, lots of men make hats. Some of the finest designers there are are men. Why, of course.
> MRS. CROSBY But he kept them locked in his closet. He was ashamed of them. He was.
> MRS. HERGESHEIMER Maybe it's just a hobby with him. Some men knit, you know, because it helps their nerves.
> MRS. CROSBY I'm going to ask him to leave. (Short Plays 64)

After her neighbor has left, Mrs. Crosby tries on the hat in the mirror of the living room. She makes fun of it by posing ridiculously before removing the hat and going into the kitchen. Emerging from his hiding place, Mr. Newbold picks up the hat and tries it on himself; but he is unable to make it work for him anymore:

> *(Lovingly, he picks up the hat and carries it to the mirror where he puts it on, looking at himself. He strikes one or two poses in an effort to create some image of beauty, but he does not succeed. The image has been destroyed for him. He drops the hat onto a chair, then himself falls onto the sofa and cries like a hopeless child.).* (Short Plays 65)

The hats he made were a dream for him. He could try them on and produce a different world for a number of minutes. Beauty had a living place in his life. It will no longer be possible to re-create those moments. We have little hope that he will recover from this blow. The element of "hope" is, once again, very dim.

What this adds to our lexicon of Inge characters is the effect of society upon their delicate psyches. Once exposed to ridicule, the purity of the dream (of self-image, of fantasy, of love itself) cannot be regained. Once exposed to criticism or judgment, the pure ideal will crumble, and the bearer will never again be the same. Although slightly amusing when applied to this incident of a man and ladies' hats, the issue becomes more poignant in the context of sharing emotions. We must also consider to what lengths might an individual go to protect his/her ideal from discovery? To what lengths could someone be driven to avoid exposure or entrapment?

"To Bobolink, For Her Spirit"

This is usually accepted as the first of Inge's one-act plays. In Shuman's book, published while Inge was alive, it is said to have been written with Shirley Booth in mind for the role of Bobolink. That would certainly place it early in the period of one-acts because Inge was writing Come Back, Little Sheba at that time as well, and Booth was connected with Sheba from the beginning.

There are more characters in this play than in almost any other that Inge wrote. Autograph hunters hover outside the 21 Club in New York. There is a pack of them, and the doorman of the club, who is a silent character, is kept busy separating them from the series of celebrants who enter the restaurant and leave it for other places. Although many of these patrons have lines they are essentially walk-ons, and although the autograph hunters have names (Nellie, Renaldo, Fritz, Gretchen, Annamarie) there is essentially only one character, Bobolink Bowen, the ringleader,

> *. . . a woman probably in her early thirties, who is so fat that her body, in silhouette, would form an almost perfect circle. Bobolink has the fat woman's usual disposition, stolidly complacent and happy. Her lips usually are formed in a grin of guzzling contentment. Her hair is short and kinky, she wears thick-lensed glasses that reduce her eyes to the size of buttonholes. . . .* (Short Plays 5)

Bobolink is whom she collects. She is selective about the autographs she goes after. She is the president of the Tyrone Power fan club and is quick to tell her favorite story:

BOBOLINK And I hunted all through them cars till I found him. He was still packing his things and he was in a hurry. . . he wasn't stuck up at all. I introduced myself as the president of the Irvington Fan Club, and told him we had forty-three members and met once a week to discuss his career . . . And he gave me lots of autographs to give to other club members but he made me promise not to give them to anyone else. . . . Then he told me to call him Tyrone, and he said he was very indebted to me. See what he wrote? 'To Bobolink, for her faithful enthusiasm and spirit'. (Short Plays 9-10)

Then her friend, Nellie, who accompanied her at the time, tells the rest of the story:

NELLIE . . . He came hurrying through the gate with his coat collar turned up so no one would recognize him. I called out, "Hi, Tyrone! I'm a friend of Bobolink," but he started running.

BOBOLINK He didn't want people to know who he was. Sometimes they get mobbed by fans and get their clothes ripped off and even get hurt. I wouldn't want anything like that to happen to Tyrone. (Short Plays 10)

The world of the movie-star worshipper is a world of dreams. As we see in the play, sometimes these desperate seekers will get an autograph even if they don't know who the person is. Then they speculate about whom this signature might belong to. You don't have to work, to make sense or to be particularly bright to collect autographs, and in a dream world does it really matter if you nod off once in a while into your own dream? Bobolink lives vicariously on the prestige she gains through the autographs in her book, the adventures she relates, and her obvious disdain for lesser celebrities. It is a world of dreams, and if the dreams are strong enough, the hope is not so very important after all. Bobolink is an earlier version of Viola from "Memory of Summer". She has no life of her own. She lives vicariously by collecting the signatures of those who have achieved the status of "dream celebrity". Her life is to record their passage. They were here beside her at this time; therefore she has importance. We are offered no insight into what Bobolink's past may be or whom she may have loved. Now she loves her stars, and that is existence enough for her.

Inge's themes in these one-acts revolve around the issue of love in all of its guises. Just as we see a cyclical set of characters in "The Mall" (from the

beginnings of love to the end of life), so we see aspects of the love cycle exposed in the rest of these one-act plays. The aspects of love -- first love; love remembered; love lost and unrequited; and love unspoken -- determine the outcome of the lives of Inge's primary characters. There is also a (mid-Western) Protestant ethic herein: once you have made love or given your love, you must not abandon the liaison. Abandon it, and the guilt you will suffer will follow you throughout your life until you abandon your own existence.

Inge wrote no more one-act plays until after the final disaster on Broadway in 1966. His final one-acts would make an excellent subject for a separate thesis. They include the titles: "The Call", "Midwestern Manic", "A Murder", "The Killing", "Margaret's Bed" and his final one-act, alternately titled "The Disposal" or "Don't Go Gentle". Several of these remain unpublished.

CHAPTER IV THE SUCCESSES

> "Success is counted sweetest by those who ne'er succeed", according to Emily Dickinson, and I realize what she meant when I compare the success I once anticipated with the success I found. They are not the same things, at all. But the four plays in this volume represent almost a decade in my life, a decade that was very intensely lived. Publishing the plays now is like tying those years together to file away, years in which I managed to find some expression for my life and experience, and to find response. Maybe this is all that success means. (Four Plays x)

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA

During the period of his major success, Inge was clearly less impressed than he had hoped to be. Given some of the difficulties of the rehearsal and preparation process of his early plays, this seems hardly surprising. At the time, Inge's agent was Audrey Wood, the same woman who represented Tennessee Williams. Her memory of that early period includes these notes regarding Come Back, Little Sheba:

> As always, the path to the eventual production was littered with all sorts of frustrating obstacles. Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner of the Guild were, to say the least, uncertain about Inge's play and its potential with audiences. For many months, they dragged their collective feet. . . .
>
> At last it was decided to give the play a week's tryout run at the Westport Country Playhouse, toward the end of the summer of 1949. But the exact date for that run was not settled for many weeks, and when it finally was set, it turned out to be for an extra week's booking after Labor Day, following the Playhouse's regular subscription season. Not precisely an auspicious time. The summer audiences would have departed; if it was a hot night, there would be no air conditioning, and -- more important, as it turned out -- no heat in the theater if it proved chilly.
>
> But we went forward. Phyllis [Anderson, of the Theater Guild] and I worked together on the project, and we secured Daniel Mann as the director. He had done some B films in Hollywood and worked in New York at the Actors Studio, but as yet he hadn't done anything important on Broadway. For the part of Doc, one of the two major leads, Sidney Blackmer, a very fine actor, was cast. For his wife, it was Lawrence Langner's suggestion that we try for Shirley Booth . . . .

> Finally all the pieces were together and we went into rehearsal, with our date in September. I am certain it was the latest post-season date the Guild had ever played at the Country Playhouse, and I will never forget our first and only dress rehearsal, on the Sunday night before the Monday opening.
>
> The Guild, lacking its regular subscribers, had asked various Westport businessmen and other friendly locals to come sit in the theater for the Sunday-night preview. They'd in effect "papered" the house so the actors could get a sense of someone being out there.
>
> It turned out to be a very cold September night. Liebling and I went to the theater and took our seats, and never have I been so chilled as I was in that drafty auditorium. I remember my husband taking off his jacket and putting it around my shoulders, and there we were, huddled together in the dark like refugees on a sinking ship, surrounded by other equally frigid spectators, all of us shivering.[1]

That audience saw:

> What was to be his first Broadway play. . . a sensitive and well-written drama about two very ordinary people, a middle-aged chiropractor named Doc, with an alcohol problem he was fighting, and Lola, his mild, somewhat disheveled sympathetic wife. (Wood, 223)

Come Back, Little Sheba explores characters caught in an existence between dream and reality. Marie and her boyfriends, Bruce and Turk, are almost who Lola and Doc were in earlier times. Doc, an alcoholic who feels his life has stopped because he had to marry Lola, sees both sides of this every day. To him, Marie is a pure angel who lives in his house. He finds solace in humming Ave Maria watching Marie move about the living room, until Lola enters by the backdoor, slamming it and spoiling the mood. Lola has allowed herself to grow to fat and to become a housekeeper rather than a wife. She uses all the terms of endearment, but the physical side of the relationship is over. Doc hears her reminiscences as hollow echoes of his former dreams:

> LOLA *(In the same tone of reverie)* I was pretty then, wasn't I, Doc? Remember the first time you kissed me? You were scared as a young girl, I believe, Doc; you trembled so. *(She is being very soft and delicate. Caught in the reverie,*

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[1] Audrey Wood, Represented by Audrey Wood, (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1981) 223-225.

he chokes a little and cannot answer) We'd been going together all year and you were always so shy. Then for the first time you grabbed me and kissed me. Tears came to your eyes, Doc, and you said you'd love me forever and ever. Remember? You said. . . if I didn't marry you, you wanted to die. . . . I remember 'cause it scared me for anyone to say a thing like that. (Four Plays 32)

At that point Doc goes out onto the front porch of their house, and Lola follows him; their conversation about the baby that never arrived is carried on in the open air.

Lola lives in a former time, as well; she just manages to get from one day to the next by leaving her chores from the night before to fill in the hours of the following morning. Her lost youth is symbolized by her lost dog, the pure white, dainty Sheba of the title.

Marie is physically attracted to Turk, who is happy to spend the night with her. They adopt a very modern approach to the physical side of their relationship:

TURK . . . what do you want to put on such a front for?
MARIE It's not a front.
TURK What else is it? *(Mimicking)* Oh, no, Turk. Not tonight, Turk. I want to talk about philosophy, Turk. *(Himself again)* When all the time you know that if I went outa here without givin' you a good lovin' you'd be sore as hell. . . . Wouldn't you?
MARIE *(She has to admit to herself it's true; she chuckles)* Oh. . . Turk. . . .
TURK It's true, isn't it?
MARIE Maybe.
TURK How about tonight, lovely; going to be lonesome?
MARIE Turk, you're in training.
TURK What of it? I can throw that old javelin any old time, any old time. C'mon, Baby, we've got by with it before, haven't we? (Four Plays 41)

Marie fully realizes the futility of any more permanent relationship with him and leaves with the more stable, better-educated Bruce the minute he proposes. Lola caters to both the boys, living vicariously through Marie's youth and attractiveness.

Marie's conduct (sleeping with Turk in her rented room in their home) brings her down from the pedestal upon which Doc has placed her, and he erupts against Lola for sheltering them. When his dream world collides with the reality

of his own relationship, he explodes and returns to his addiction after hurling abuse at his wife.

> There is one climactic scene in the second act of Sheba in which Doc, a usually quiet man, suddenly goes off the wagon, and in his demented drunken state threatens to kill his wife with a hatchet. Coming as it does after a long and quiet series of scenes between the two characters, it is highly melodramatic and something of a shock to an audience. I'd always felt, in reading the play, that this was the crucial scene. If it worked for the audience, if it held them, then I was certain Inge had written a viable piece of theater.
>
> To my utter joy, this cold night in Westport, with an audience of complete strangers who weren't really theatergoers and had no idea whatsoever what they were going to see, when we came to that startling scene between Blackmer and Booth, you couldn't hear a sound from anywhere in the drafty theater. We knew. Sheba worked! (Wood 225)

Doc returns home after a week in rehabilitation, and they begin a new life. Marie is gone now; so are their dreams of youth. Lola has tidied up both herself and the house. Doc is dutifully drinking grapefruit juice.

> DOC *(With a new feeling of control)* Fruit juice. I'll need lots of fruit juice for a while. The doctor said it would restore the vitamins. You see, that damn whiskey kills all the vitamins in your system, eats up all the sugar in your kidneys. They came around every morning and shot vitamins in my arm. Oh, it didn't hurt. And the doctor told me to drink a quart of fruit juice every day. . . .
> DOC The doctor said I should have a hobby. Said I should go out more. That's all that's wrong with me. I thought maybe I'd go hunting once in a while. (Four Plays 67-68)

Doc has dreams for the future, and Lola has dreams which prophesy an end to her yearning for the past.

> LOLA . . . Marie and I were going to the Olympics back in our old high school stadium. There were thousands of people there. There was Turk out in the center of the field throwing the javelin. Everytime he threw it, the crowd would roar. . . and you know who the man in charge was? It was my father. Isn't that funny?. . . But Turk kept changing into someone else all the time. And then my father disqualified him. So he had to sit on the sidelines. . . and guess who took his place, Daddy? You! You came trotting out there on the field just as big as you please. . .
> DOC *(Smilingly)* How did I do, Baby?

LOLA Fine. You picked the javelin up real careful, like it was awful heavy. But you threw it, Daddy, clear, clear up into the sky. And it never came down again. *(Doc looks very pleased with himself. LOLA goes on)* Then it started to rain. And I couldn't find Little Sheba. I almost went crazy looking for her and there were so many people, I didn't even know where to look. And you were waiting to take me home. And we walked and walked through the slush and mud, and people were hurrying all around us and. . . and. . . *(Leaves stove and sits. Sentimental tears come to her eyes)* But this part is sad, Daddy. All of a sudden I saw Little Sheba. . . and she was lying in the middle of the field. . . dead. . . It made me cry, Doc. No one paid any attention. . . I cried and cried. It made me feel so bad, Doc. That sweet little puppy. . . her curly white fur all smeared with mud, and no one to stop and take care of her. . .

DOC Why couldn't you?

LOLA I wanted to, but you wouldn't let me. You kept saying, "We can't stay here, honey; we gotta go on. We gotta go on." *(Pause)* Now, isn't that strange?

DOC Dreams are funny. (Four Plays 68-69)

Did the little white dog symbolize their unborn child? Lola's virginal aspect? Their former pure love? What is its place in the rest of their lives? Is Inge suggesting their marriage will now continue to develop successfully, now that the past has been abandoned?

There is a ring of falsehood about this ending. Anyone who understands alcoholism knows (or at least, suspects) that there is little reality in the hope promised by the final sequence.

LOLA I don't think Little Sheba's ever coming back, Doc. I'm not going to call her any more.

DOC Not much point in it, Baby. I guess she's gone for good.

LOLA I'll fix your eggs.

(She gets up, embraces DOC, and goes to stove. DOC remains at table sipping his fruit juice). (Four Plays 69)

But the characters ring true. Doc, like any alcoholic, actually believes his intentions are honorable. Lola, like most wives of alcoholics, honestly believes she can make a difference. Sacrificing her own dreams is not a new idea to any wife of an addict. We know it isn't right, and that it has little chance of success; but we do believe that the characters believe. And although the hope may be dashed later, it is that hope which springs eternal within us: hope for a new beginning, for life to renew itself just once more.

Lola here abandons her dreams of finding this symbol of her past as gracefully as Jackie dropped her roses before leaving Bus Riley in the Paradise of her past, and crossed the threshold into her own future. For Inge this form of sacrifice is necessary in order for there to be any hope in the future of these characters. What is more, his audiences seemed to understand that interpretation as well.

> The next night, the official opening, was almost an anticlimax for us. Not for the audience, however. When the final curtain fell, there was wild applause. Two performers cast against type, a director given his first major job, a play by a hitherto unknown author. . . it was a marvelous feeling to know that we had something wonderful here. (Wood 225)

In many ways Wood was right, they certainly had something wonderful, but it may not have been what they thought they had. Inge never explored the thin line between entrapment and hope more nakedly than he did in this play. Largely due to his own well-developed sense of guilt, Doc has been entrapped into a marriage. He loved Lola to the point of worship. He all but violated his private feelings of worship for the perfect ideal of all that could be embodied in "woman" by making love to her. Then she announced there would be a child, and he married her, abandoning his hopes of becoming a doctor, settling for the position of chiropractor instead. At least he had Lola, his perfect love at his side. But then she changed, she no longer personified all that was pure and noble in woman, she became simply a slovenly caretaker in his home and a nagging reminder of all that he had abandoned. He felt entrapped by the house he lived in with her, by his less-than-prestigious job, and by her affectionate patter and constant reminders of the past. Then Marie entered their lives and moved into the dining room. Their marriage situated itself in the kitchen where they could both watch real life going on in the dining area in the youth and promise of the young girl. To a degree, Doc became entrapped by the promise of that youth; he fantasized about her beauty and made her the living personification of his former dreams.

Lola too opted for a dream existence, content to relive her own youth through Marie, content to bask in the reflection of the younger woman's popularity, content to serve as handmaiden to Marie's dinner party as she served as cook to Doc. She was happy to sacrifice her position as landlady in order to be included in a life that seemed more real than her own.

Inge explores what happens when the sacrifice is that which is purest. After removing the very essence of life, how is it possible for life to continue? He explores the excuses made in order to continue an existence after the compromise of whatever it was that formed the life centre, the golden part, the very focus of that existence.

As a young man Doc wanted to heal, and he sought a holy relationship between himself and a pure woman. Inge only hints at why that soured. Doc was "scared as a young girl" the first time he kissed Lola. The first time he grabbed her and kissed her, "tears came" to his eyes. He swore to love "forever and ever." Inge seems to apologize for such tenderness in a male character. If he can feel it why cannot Doc? Why do such feelings in men have to be kept in closets like Mr. Newbold's hat? As Lola recalls this, Inge has Doc reply first in a "repressed tone"; as she continues --

> And when the evening came on, we stretched out on the cool grass and you kissed me all night long --

Doc begins to open doors as if to let air in upon the subject that took place "twenty years ago": ". . . Those years have just vanished-- vanished into thin air" (Four Plays 32). She continues: "Just disappeared - - like Little Sheba." When she finally asks if he is sorry he married her, he reassures her; but when she insists --

> LOLA . . . are you sorry you had to marry me? (Four Plays 33) --

Doc exits to the porch, and their central exchange continues there; for only a brief moment it actually exists in the open air of their reality:

> DOC *(Goes to porch)* We were never going to talk about that, Baby.
> LOLA *(Following Doc out)* You were the first one, Daddy, the only one. I'd just die if you didn't believe that.
> DOC *(Tenderly)* I know, Baby.
> LOLA You were so nice and so proper, Doc; I thought nothing we could do together could ever be wrong -- or make us unhappy. Do you think we did wrong, Doc?
> DOC *(Consoling)* No, Baby, of course I don't.
> LOLA I don't think anyone knows about it except my folks, do you?
> DOC Of course not, Baby.
> LOLA *(Follows him in)* I wish the baby had lived, Doc. I don't think that woman knew her business, do you Doc?
> DOC I guess not.

LOLA If we'd gone to a doctor, she would have lived, don't you think?
DOC Perhaps.
LOLA A doctor wouldn't have known we'd just got married, would he? Why were we so afraid?
DOC *(Sits on couch)* We were just kids. Kids don't know how to look after things.
LOLA *(Sits on couch)* If we'd had the baby she'd be a young girl now; then maybe you'd have saved your money, Doc, and she could be going to college-- like Marie. (Four Plays 33)

This suggestion that Marie might be their daughter is never pursued any further by the playwright, but it casts another interpretation upon Doc's fantasies about their tenant.

Doc sought an abortion for Lola. He sullied both the profession he revered and the woman he worshipped in order to hide what they saw as their sin. To atone for that he tries to forget, "to live for the present"(Four Plays 33). He warns us that "If you can't forget the past, you stay in it and never get out" (Four Plays 33). Then he continues to list all the ways his past haunts his present, all the ways he uses to ensure that he will never get out. He escapes to dreams: Marie is both the child they never had and the reincarnation of Lola. When Doc discovers that Marie has been sleeping with Turk in Doc's own dining room, he explodes at the two women as if they were the same one.

DOC *(Back to audience)* I suppose you tucked them in bed together and peeked through the keyhole and applauded.
LOLA *(Sickened)* Doc, don't talk that way. Bruce is a nice boy. They're gonna get married.
DOC He probably has to marry her, the poor bastard. Just 'cause she's pretty and he got amorous one day. . . Just like I had to marry you.
LOLA Oh, Doc!
DOC You and Marie are both a couple of sluts. (Four Plays 56)

In each of his successful plays we find a character who represents Inge's view of love and whose reactions to the circumstances of the plot determine his or her choices about where he/she will find a place on that cycle of love we explored in the one-act plays. In many of the plays, the character shares specific identifiable attributes with the playwright himself. In some cases this may simply be a common age, as in the case of Virgil and Doctor Lyman in Bus Stop; in other cases it is a specific problem (alcoholism) or interest (psychology or philosophy), as in Doc and Doctor Lyman respectively. In most cases it is through this

character that Inge expresses his most personal view of the world and its inhabitants. For that reason, this specific character will be referred to from this point as "the Inge character". It is interesting to speculate about that character's position on the cycle or continuum of love. Does it change from play to play or is it relatively constant? How personal does the entrapment of each plot become to "the Inge character" and how close to the "action" of the plot does he or she figure?

In Sheba this is Doc, an alcoholic, a professional man who has some smattering of knowledge about psychology and some experience with those institutions which are designed to deal with both the addiction and the mental trauma. As suggested above, the character whose problem is at the centre of this play displays many of the characteristics of the playwright himself. Inge chooses to leave Doc at one of the series of rehabilitation stages with the eternal hope of the addict: next time will be better. When those "stages" become a predictable pattern they too serve as an entrapment for the person who is continuing to fool himself. At best, Doc is the protagonist of the play, although the focus of the audience's sympathy clearly shifted to Lola.

Lola's problem was less threatening. She had strong sexual urges and tried to repress them to please her family, her father. For her the void left by the loss of the child is filled by her dog, Sheba, which is as pure and white as her lost virtue had been. She is content to live vicariously through Marie and to re-live her youth through Marie's boyfriends. When she loses the dog she loses her focus, but all she seems to need to do is: get hold of herself, clean up, tidy the house and be good to her husband. In America of the early 1950's these were sterling virtues, and, what's more, they were attainable. Didn't every woman in the audience make these sacrifices every day? The dream Lola recounts at the end of the play reassures us of her willingness to abandon her fantasy in exchange for the reality of Doc's phrase: "We gotta go on" (Four Plays 69). That was positive. There was hope in that. Strangely it involved another sacrifice. Lola's innocent fantasies were now being sacrificed in order to allow them both to "get out" of the past. And that guaranteed a kind of future, at least for a number of days.

PICNIC

The Inge character in the next Broadway success is not so easy to identify. Again we have a central love story between a drifter named Hal and a small-town beauty named Madge. Again we have innocence in the form of Millie, Madge's sister, who is emerging from adolescence into young womanhood. There are also those characters who by now seemed almost obligatory, hovering on the side-lines ready to ooze local colour and provide exposition: Mrs. Owens, the girls' mother; the next-door neighbor, Mrs. Potts; Hal's college buddy, Alan, who is seeing Madge; and a fresh kid named Bomber (Joker, in the first rehearsal script), who worships Madge. But there is another character who is more strongly drawn and whose personal tragedy threatens to dominate the play. This is the spinster school-teacher, Rosemary, who is quite desperate to marry. Her chosen husband-to-be is Howard, a store-keeper from a neighboring town.

The motif of sacrifice, of compromising our golden centre, is split in Picnic between the young lovers and the middle-aged couple who are keeping company. This double focus can either provide a strong feeling of an ensemble piece with strong characterizations for all performers or it can seem to divide the play down the middle and cause problems for an audience in search of a strong central thread to follow.

The play seems to have had problems even in its rehearsal stages. The director, Joshua Logan, recalls some of the incidents which eventually led to the choices made for the first Broadway opening:

> Our pre-Broadway tour began in Columbus, Ohio. The cast gave an exciting performance at the Columbus opening, but there was something about the play that was wrong, something intangible that clouded the reaction. Why hadn't we sensed this before? It takes an audience to make cataracts drop away.
>
> The next morning, the reviews were divided. One man talked of the poetic beauty of the play, another was offended by certain lines and actions, particularly those of Hal. Bill Inge's face was puffy and almost white. He could scarcely talk when I asked him how he felt. He stuttered a bit and went to his room, and on from there to New York without seeing anyone. He never saw another performance until the road tour ended.
>
> . . . In Cleveland, I found white-faced, black-moustached David Merrick in the lobby. . . I asked Merrick the reason for this dichotomy of opinion. "I'm not sure," he said, "but it has got to have

something to do with the Meeker character.[2] Every time he comes on, I bristle. I can't stand the way he swaggers, brags and poses all over the place." I listened to him, but was still puzzled.

That night, two men came up the aisle talking excitedly, and I heard only two very vehemently spoken words: "Some hero!"

Hero! I felt as though I were in a comic strip and a huge electric bulb had turned on in my head. Hero? They think we think he's a hero. We, the creators, think this slob's heroic!! They don't realize that we see those unattractive things about him as clearly as they do. To them, a true hero wouldn't brag, wouldn't lie, wouldn't show off, wouldn't be a bit sweaty at times-- but they think we don't feel that way. They think we believe everything he does is attractive. And that all fits with what David Merrick said.

I called Bill Inge and told him what I had discovered.

"Josh, if you can think of anything to do, do it. Write it down and I'll okay it. In the meantime, just put it in, if you feel it will help." He obviously thought it was a disaster.

. . . Here are the lines we put in, although they were changed later for publication:

FLO But a fraternity! Don't these boys have more. . . breeding?
ALAN Maybe, but fraternities like to pledge big athletes-- But I know what you're thinking, Mrs. Owens.
FLO How did the other boys feel about him?
ALAN They didn't like him, Mrs. Owens. When he came around, every man on that campus seemed to bristle. When I first met him I couldn't stand the way he bragged and swaggered and posed all over the place, and then I found out that Hal's really a nice guy, believe it or not.

We checked it with Bill Inge by phone. He changed a word or two and we put it in. From that night on, the play was a hit. The audience knew exactly where we stood on the subject of Hal and where they stood.[3]

Audiences were not always sure where they stood with other aspects of this play either. The themes of entrapment, hope and despair are probably best explored in Scene One of Act Three. In this scene, Inge cleverly juxtaposes the two couples and their reactions upon their arrival home early in the morning. Each couple has had intercourse for the first time that night.

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2 The character of Hal was played by actor Ralph Meeker.
3 Josh Logan, Josh (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976) 283-84.

The first to arrive are Rosemary and Howard. She delivers monosyllabic reactions to his pleasant overtures toward good-night, then begins her demands:

HOWARD *(He pecks at her cheek with a kiss)* Good night. Maybe I should say, good morning. *(He starts off)*
ROSEMARY *(Just coming to)* Where you goin', Howard?
HOWARD Honey, I gotta get home.
ROSEMARY You can't go off without me.
HOWARD Honey, talk sense.
ROSEMARY You can't go off without me. Not after tonight. That's sense.
HOWARD Honey, be reasonable.
ROSEMARY Take me with you. (Four Plays 128)

She accuses him of planning never to return, of taking advantage of her love making by never seeing her again. He protests that things will go on as usual; she is not satisfied for that to happen:

ROSEMARY You said you were gonna marry me, Howard. You said when I got back from my vacation, you'd be waitin' with the preacher.
HOWARD Honey, I've had an awful busy summer and. . .
ROSEMARY Where's the preacher, Howard? Where is he?
HOWARD *(Walking away from her)* Honey, I'm forty-two years old. A person forms certain ways of livin', then one day it's too late to change.
ROSEMARY *(Grabbing his arm and holding him)* Come back here, Howard. I'm no spring chicken either. Maybe I'm a little older than you think I am. I've formed my ways too. But they can be changed. They gotta be changed. It's no good livin' like this. (Four Plays 129-130)

She begins to demand that he marry her. He makes excuses about his business and the preparations, but she is adamant, demanding that he pick her up in the morning and take her to a wedding.

ROSEMARY I'll be waitin' for you in the morning, Howard.
HOWARD *(After a few moments' troubled thought)* No.
ROSEMARY *(A muffled cry)* Howard!
HOWARD I'm not gonna marry anyone that says, "You gotta marry me, Howard." I'm not gonna. *(He is silent. ROSEMARY weeps pathetic tears. Slowly HOWARD reconsiders)* If a woman wants me to marry her--she can at least say "please."
ROSEMARY *(Beaten and humble)* Please marry me, Howard.
HOWARD Well--you got to give me time to think it over.

ROSEMARY *(Desperate)* Oh, God! Please marry me, Howard. Please. . . *(She sinks to her knees)* Please. . . . please. . . (Four Plays 131)

Howard is incredibly embarrassed and tries to get away; Rosemary elicits a promise that he will arrive in the morning to take her to the wedding. She continues to beg, actually repeating her single pathetic "please" five times before he is finally allowed to leave and she enters the house.

Almost immediately, Hal and Madge appear. Their situation is exactly the same except they have only known each other a few hours.

(The stage is empty for several moments. Then MADGE runs on from the back, right. Her face is in her hands. She is sobbing. HAL follows fast behind. He reaches her just as she gets to the door, and grabs her by the wrist. She resists him furiously)
HAL Baby. . . you're not sorry are you?
(There is a silence. MADGE sobs)
MADGE Let me go.
HAL Please, baby. If I thought I'd done anything to make you unhappy, I. . . I'd almost wanta die.
MADGE I. . . I'm so ashamed.
HAL Don't say that, baby.
MADGE I didn't even know what was happening, and then . . . all of a sudden, it seems like my whole life was changed. (Four Plays 132)

Hal berates himself and Madge allows that it is as much her fault as his. He tries to arrange a meeting with her after she gets off work the next day, but she reminds him that she has a date with Alan, her fiance, and that Hal is now an employee of Alan's, scheduled to start his job within hours. He asks what she will tell her mother, and she says she'll think of something. She starts again for the door.

HAL Baby--would you kiss me good night. . . maybe? Just one more time.
MADGE I don't think I better.
HAL Please!
MADGE It. . . It'd just start things all over again. Things I better forget.
HAL Pretty please!
MADGE Promise not to hold me?
HAL I'll keep my hands to my side. Swear to God!
MADGE Well. . . *(Slowly she goes toward him, takes his face in her hands and kisses him. The kiss lasts. HAL's hands become nervous and finally find their way around her.*

Their passion is revived. Then MADGE utters a little shriek, tears herself away from HAL and runs into the house, sobbing) Don't. You promised. I never wanta see you again. I might as well be dead.

(She runs inside the front door, leaving HAL behind to despise himself. He beats his fists together, kicks the earth with his heel, and starts off, hating the day he was born.) (Four Plays 133)

Each of the characters in the scene clearly feels trapped. Howard feels as if he is being trapped into a marriage he does not want because he has had one very pleasant evening with Rosemary. She feels trapped by her spinsterhood, by an existence she is not happy with, and feels it is worth it to beg if that is what is required to get her the respectability that goes with being a married woman. Madge is trapped by her own feelings. She is caught between what the propriety of her upbringing demands and her own desires and passions. She cannot reconcile the two. She feels dirty and is too honest to place all the blame on Hal. The changes that this night will occasion in her life terrify her. She faces the unknown, and she faces it alone. Hal has always been a slave to his passions, but this time he felt something very strongly about this girl. He saw her as pure, and now that he has made love to her and cannot persuade her to the joy of that experience, he feels guilty. He has besmirched the one pure thing he has encountered. In his well-established set of reactions there is only one path to take. He will run.

And so he does. Hal runs for the morning train and is watched by several of the women whom he met on their porches the day before. He does ask Madge to go with him:

HAL Do--do you love me?
MADGE *(Tears forming in her eyes)* What good is it if I do?
HAL I'm a poor bastard, baby. I've gotta claim the things in this life that're mine. Kiss me good-bye. *(He grabs her and kisses her)* Come with me, baby. They gimme a room in the basement of the hotel. It's kinda crummy but we could share it till we found something better.
FLO *(Outraged)* Madge! Are you out of your senses?
MADGE I couldn't.
(The train whistles in the distance)
FLO Young man, you'd better get on that train as fast as you can.
HAL *(To MADGE)* When you hear that train pull outa town and know I'm on it, your little heart's gonna be busted, 'cause you love me, God damn it! You love me, you love me, you love me.

(He stamps one final kiss on her lips, then runs off to catch his train. . . .). (Four Plays 143)

Both Hal and Madge are trapped by their traditions. He has to run from place to place; he has never been able to establish roots. She has never been out of this town, away from her mother's scrutiny or off a pedestal reserved for pretty small-town virgins. They can free each other. They could love each other and provide all the contrasts needed to make them whole as individuals, but they are each of them too much a creature of habit. For the real catharsis of the situation to work, he must leave and blow with the wind until there is nothing left of him; and she must remain and become a little less of herself each day until she too, like her mother and Rosemary, has no way out. For Inge, the catharsis can only occur when we realize that if the escape is left too late it may not happen at all.

There were a number of versions of this play, of course. It began as the rehearsal title, Front Porch, grew through a series of rehearsals under the direction of Joshua Logan into the Picnic presented in New York in 1953, and was later revised for the first publication. Its final form is in the published version of Summer Brave. According to Joshua Logan, Inge ". . . rewrote the last act of Picnic hundreds of times. . ." (Logan 285). His strongest memories of those rewrites were, naturally, for the production he directed:

> The major difficulty with the play was Bill's last act, which consisted of complete frustration for everyone. He even turned the beautiful Madge into the "town pump", an ending which, I was convinced, would leave the audience as unhappy as it did me. . . . He was afraid of being slick, of pandering to the public with a "happy ending", so he kept writing this endlessly slow dimout. Everything was negative: Hal left Madge; Madge's rich suitor, Alan, left town; Howard left Rosemary; and Madge, besmirched, walked back to the dime store with local boys catcalling. It was such an attenuated rosary of disappointments that I had a feeling the audience might go to sleep. . . .
>
> Without Lawrence Langner there could have been no Picnic. I was so discouraged with the first draft that I gave it up. Lawrence gave nothing up. . . . One day he called me and said, "I've been working with Inge until we have two good acts and one last impossible act with so many negative scenes that I can hardly read it. But I think if we go into rehearsal, Bill will see how bad it is and give us something else. He's promised me he'll try. Will you come back in and take a chance?" (Logan 279)

After a number of readings and more opinions against the ending, Logan recalls that Inge reacted to his director's input with a more positive approach:

> "But we can't just have a 'corny' happy ending."
> I jumped in with, "It wouldn't be corny or happy. If Madge left with Hal, a worthless braggart with no money and no real job, it would ultimately be a disaster. Oh, they'd have a bit of sex all right, but no security and not the decent life she and her mother had dreamed of. She'd obviously end up where her mother is, deserted by her man, saddled with brats and destitute. It would be grim history repeating itself. Is that happy? Is that corny?
> I could see Bill suddenly flush and stand up. He said, "What if Madge appeared at the door with a suitcase, wearing a flowery chiffon dress, tall six-inch heels, and a picture hat? She says, 'Mom, I'm going to Tulsa.' Her mother groans and begs her to stay, holding her, pleading with her, but Madge cannot be deterred. She pulls away from Flo--breaks the umbilical cord--and walks slowly and inevitably toward the bus station--while her mother collapses sobbing on the steps." (Logan 281)

Everyone was delighted with that proposal, and Logan went so far as to announce it to a jubilant cast. Four days later, he recalls, he received virtually the same third act, if anything longer and more turgid.

> . . . I told him with passion how they [the cast] had been looking forward to a less depressing ending. This one would kill their spirit. "Bill, please, just write the one you outlined. If it isn't good we won't use it. We already have this version. Let's at least see another one."
> He was very angry. "All right, I'll write it," he said. "But I want you to know I don't approve." He turned sharply from me and left. (Logan 281-282)

When the promised version arrived the next morning, Logan reports that the cast "...leaped on it like ravenous animals. Without question, it struck the right note. It was satisfying, yet with a hint of the implied tragedy that ran through the play" (Logan 282).

In the edition published in Four Plays we have the ending that Logan requested. In it, Howard does turn up the next morning and carries Rosemary off to the preacher amidst the good wishes of all her girlfriends. For Howard, marriage will occasion some rationalizations: "A man's got to settle down some time." and "...folks'd rather do business with a married man!" (Four Plays 139). Rosemary is ecstatic. Why not, she has everything she wants. Madge heads for

the bus station amid the cat-calls of the boys on the street but she just keeps walking.

It is difficult to assess the themes of entrapment in this play given the obvious displeasure of the playwright with his own ending. His original ending (or at least, the one he finally published in Summer Brave) gives us a stronger sense of consequence. If you choose to live in a small town and let your morality slip below their standards, you are going to be treated in a certain way. It is a variation on Inge's caution against making the first slip. If you corrupt innocence, whether it be your own or someone else's, you will be required to answer to some kind of divine retribution. Rosemary's happy ending with Howard is as hollow as it reads and unfortunately lends an aura of fantasy to a scene which many have seen as electric, the scene when Rosemary actually goes to her knees to beg a man to marry her. Inge was trying to say some very honest things about how we relate to each other and got caught in the theatrical necessity of pleasing the audience. One remembers Audrey Wood's delight at watching a tricky scene he had written in Sheba convince an audience on its dress rehearsal. What, we can only wonder, might have happened if Inge's original ending had been given that same opportunity? Wood has her own answer:

> Summer Brave has come and gone, but Picnic remains, as strong and successful as it was all those years ago when Madge first ran off to follow her lover, Hal, to the applause of satisfied theatergoers. (Wood 230)

At the end of Act Three, scene one, Inge's final stage direction says a great deal about his choices for "the Inge character" on the love continuum.

> *(She [Madge] runs inside the front door, leaving Hal behind to despise himself. He beats his fists together, kicks the earth with his heel, and starts off, hating the day he was born.)* (Four Plays 133)

If Hal is not tied to the same Protestant ethic as Madge, why does he "despise himself"? Why should he "hate the day he was born"? Hal is not the rebel he presents, nor the cad Logan defined; he can be touched by innocence; that innocence speaks to something similar in him. Part of his reality feels that their love-making is natural and beautiful and good. Why cannot that part win? In Sheba, Doc married the girl in this same situation. Here Hal bolts from the responsibilities which Doc assumed he owed for life. Which is the more honest reaction? And for whom? Is Hal not revealed finally as "the Inge character" by his reactions in this scene? And yet, to preserve the heroine,

Logan persuaded Inge to an alternate ending. Which part of Inge was it that needed that? What was it that he had originally intended?

Picnic won a number of major awards and made William Inge almost a household name after the movie based on the play became a major box-office hit. It is interesting to speculate about what that taught William Inge about trusting his own work; and what he discovered about the place of compromise in the Broadway theatre.

BUS STOP

> Two years later, Bill had completed his next play, and it too would be a remarkably successful work. This time he had told the story of a third-rate nightclub singer who is catapulted into an impromptu romance with a somewhat tongue-tied cowboy during the course of a blizzard, in which both are marooned in a small cafe, once again in Kansas.
> Bus Stop was produced by Robert Whitehead and Roger Stevens, and directed by Harold Clurman. It opened on Broadway March 2, 1955. This time there were no problems with Bill's plot or characters; audiences and critics responded warmly to his story. (Wood 230-1)

Inge's most popular play, Bus Stop re-creates the same situation as the earlier one-act, "People in the Wind". The central love-story is still between Cherie and Bo, but subtle changes have appeared:

> *. . . CHERIE, a young blond girl of about twenty, enters as though driven. She wears no hat, and her hair, despite one brilliant bobby pin, blows wild about her face. She is pretty in a fragile, girlish way. . . . Her clothes, considering her situation, are absurd: a skimpy jacket of tarnished metal cloth edged with not luxuriant fur, a dress of sequins and net, and gilded sandals that expose brightly enameled toes. Also her make-up has been applied under the influence of having seen too many movies. Her lipstick creates a voluptuous pair of lips that aren't her own and her eyebrows also form a somewhat arbitrary line. But despite all these defects, her prettiness still is apparent, and she has the appeal of a tender little bird.* (Four Plays 157)

> *. . . the two cowboys, BO DECKER and VIRGIL BLESSING, enter. Their appearance now is rumpledly picturesque and they both could pass, at first glance, for outlaws. BO is in his early twenties, is tall and slim and good-looking in an outdoors way. Now he is very unkempt. He wears faded jeans that cling to his legs like shedding skin; his boots, worn under his jeans, are scuffed and dusty; and*

> *the Stetson on the back of his head is worn and tattered. Over a faded denim shirt he wears a shiny horsehide jacket, and around his neck is tied a bandanna. VIRGIL is a man in his forties who seems to regard BO in an almost parental way. A big man, corpulent and slow-moving, he seems almost an adjunct of BO.* (Four Plays 169)

Bo is now much more attractive. He is younger than previously, and he is now accompanied by Virgil, who provides the weather-beaten side of the previous character. At this point Inge has effectively split his leading man into two parts. One is a conventional hero (Bo), the other (Virgil), his "almost parental" sidekick, his "adjunct". The two of them have been sleeping on the bus huddled together as one against the cold, and Bo resents that no one awakened them.

> BO *(In a full voice, accustomed to speaking in an open field)* Hey! Why din anyone wake us up? Virg'n I mighta froze out there. (Four Plays 169)

These two might have remained frozen together in more ways than one, if Bo's desire for Cherie had not awakened him. When Bo eventually manages to persuade Cherie to leave with him, Virgil will not continue on the journey.

If Inge has divided his hero, he has not entirely focused upon the two parts as two sides of a single personality. He also seems to provide an expanded version of the Drunk (from "People in the Wind") in Dr. Lyman, whose gentle, unhappy drunk in the earlier play has been expanded here to a dichotomy between noble and inspired teacher and corruptor of innocence. The Lyman character is so well-drawn and controls so much of the script that he becomes a candidate, with Virgil as his major competition, for the position of "the Inge character" in Bus Stop. This presents another dichotomy. Here we see the playwright's ideals juxtaposed with his view of reality. His strongest arguments both for and against the ability of hope to triumph on the constant cycle of love are represented on the stage at the same time. How intriguing that there is no exchange between the two characters. If love is a continuum or a cycle is it ever possible to get off? Can we choose when and where to join the constant stream of travellers in search of some kind of self-fulfillment through a liaison with some other life? The separation of these two points-of-view -- that of Virgil, who is named after the classical guide to all aspects of an afterlife; and Dr. Lyman, who is a scholar and who knows all there is to know of man's history of accomplishment in the arts and sciences -- provides the pattern for many of the

pairings that Inge will explore in this play. Lyman's interest is the younger waitress, Elma,[4] "a big-eyed girl still in high school" (Four Plays 153), who is very taken with his tales of great literature and far-away places. Their conversation about love is very revealing of Inge's current philosophy as well:

> ELMA I'm sort of idealistic about things. I like to think that people fall in love and stay that way, forever and ever.
> DR. LYMAN Maybe we have lost the ability. Maybe Man has passed the stage in his evolution wherein love is possible. Maybe life will continue to become so terrifyingly complex that man's anxiety about his mere survival will render him too miserly to give of himself in any true relation.
> ELMA You're talking over my head. Anyone can fall in love, I always thought. . . and. . .
> DR LYMAN But two people, really in love, must give up something of themselves.
> ELMA *(Trying to follow)* Yes.
> DR. LYMAN That is the gift that men are afraid to make. Sometimes they keep it in their bosoms forever, where it withers and dies. Then they never know love, only its facsimiles, which they seek over and over again in meaningless repetition. (Four Plays 188-189)

Here Inge invites us to explore almost any of the characters in the play. Cherie has certainly had some of the "meaningless repetition", as has Grace. Virgil may harbor the kind of love that "withers and dies" rather than venture forth. Bo certainly will be in danger of falling into that category should he fail today in his quest for Cherie. Lyman reassures Elma that "...whether there is such a thing as love, we can always. . . pretend there is" (Four Plays 189), which probably is the best place to find him, or at least the place he would prefer that we look for him. The love continuum available through these characters and the presence of a Virgil (complete with Blessing) implies that Inge may consciously be guiding us through some kind of frozen inferno of love here in the middle of Kansas in the middle of a snowstorm in the middle of the night. When the love talk really begins to bother Elma, Lyman assures her that if she can think of nothing to say he himself can ". . . talk endlessly about the most trivial matters" (Four Plays 189).

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[4] The names of the characters are almost all mirrors to the qualities they represent, although we might not always immediately see how that is true. Consider the qualities of Grace, Elma (very close to the Alma which means "soul" which Tennesse Williams used in (Summer and Smoke) and a man who would be a "lie man" (Lyman). Cherie is "dear one" in French, and the French form of Bo would be Beau (or beautiful).

Inge's work with characters has explored new depths with this play. It is full of interesting people, each of whom fits on a unique section of the love continuum. The choric duo of Old Ladies in the earlier play has vanished (more people in the wind), but their commentary is stronger in that it is delivered now by the waitresses who come from opposite ends of the love continuum. Elma is young, naive, innocent and impressionable; the kind of child-woman Inge created for Kim Stanley in Picnic. Grace, the older waitress, "is a more seasoned character in her thirties or early forties" (Four Plays 153).

> GRACE If I didn't have this restaurant to keep me busy, I'd prob'ly go nuts. Sometimes, at night, after I empty the garbage and lock the doors and turn out the lights, I get kind of a sick feelin', 'cause I sure don't look forward to walkin' up those stairs and lettin' myself into an empty apartment.
> ELMA Gee, if you feel that way, why don't you write your husband and tell him to come back?
> GRACE *(Thinks a moment)* 'Cause I got just as lonesome when he was here. He wasn't much company, 'cept when we were makin' love. But makin' love is one thing and bein' lonesome is another. The resta the time, me and Barton was usually fightin'. (Four Plays 155)

The opinions of these two, one untried by life and love, the other well-seasoned and a little cynical, provide a constant counter-point to the larger characters who arrive on the bus. Even the minor characters, the town sheriff and Carl, the bus-driver, are skillfully drawn. Carl and Grace manage to retire to her private quarters for a quick sexual encounter, intensifying the atmosphere of chance encounters which permeates the play.

Bo and Cherie are younger versions of the couple from the earlier play, and consequently Inge has little trouble allowing them to come together. A major problem exists between the way Bo sees her and the reality of her life. When she admits to having had affairs before, Bo is taken aback. Later Inge makes this very problem and Bo's unique point of view (sponsored, or "blessed" by Virgil) the detail which permits their union and his happy ending:

> BO Cherry?
> CHERIE *(A little expectantly)* Yah?
> BO I been talkin' with my buddy, and he thinks I'm virgin enough fer the two of us.
> CHERIE *(Snickers, very amused)* Honest? Did Virgil say that?
> BO Yah. . . and I like ya like ya are, Cherry. So I don't care how ya got that way.

CHERIE *(Deeply touched)* Oh God, thass the sweetest, tenderest thing that was ever said to me. (Four Plays 214-215)

From there it is only a step to their reconciliation:

BO I still wish you was goin' back to the ranch with me, more'n anything I know.
CHERIE Ya do?
BO Yah. I do.
CHERIE Why, I'd go anywhere in the world with ya now, Bo. Anywhere at all.
BO Ya would? Ya would?
(They have a fast embrace . . . .) (Four Plays 215)

There is great hope for these two, at least in the "happily ever after vein". Because theirs is the central love-story, their hope becomes the dominant impression left by the play. As we have seen before in the one-acts, Inge has no problem with the consummation of young love. It seems there is a stop on the continuum that will permit happiness if we find it young enough.

There are, however, two characters still to be dealt with, and both are variations on William Inge himself. Both have served as guides to the young: Virgil has taught Bo everything he knows about life on the ranch and off, Lyman has been dismissed from his position as a teacher because his personal habits (at least his drunkenness) interfered with his guidance. He arranges a mock-reading of the balcony-scene from Romeo and Juliet to be rendered by young Elma and himself, a kind of re-play of his earlier transgressions. The last time we hear him in a major speech, he delivers the theme of the play, which could well serve as William Inge's definition of love:

> It takes strong men and women to love. . . People strong enough inside themselves to love. . . without humiliation. People big enough to grow with their love and live inside a whole, wide new dimension. People brave enough to bear the responsibility of being loved and not fear it as a burden. I. . . I never had the generosity to love, to give my own most private self to another, for I was weak. I thought the gift would somehow lessen me. Me! . . . I am disgusting. (Four Plays 200)

Here is Inge's recipe for love: for being loved and for giving love. It requires strength of character and an obvious ability to see yourself with love. People who cannot do this are doomed forever to ". . . talk endlessly about the most trivial matters" (Four Plays 189).

And playwrights who cannot do this are doomed forever to. . . . It is always very tempting to make such open-ended judgments reciprocal when dealing with writers. Such a cynical view is not merited in this play because Inge allows his travellers to continue on the journey to Montana and therefore, metaphorically at least, to continue their search for a place on the continuum of both life and love. There is no sacrifice in this play: there is no Lola to give up her dreams of relocating her dog or her past, no Madge to be hooted at as she moves either toward her part-time job or the bus-station. Here there is only Virgil to be left behind. But when ancients chose a sacrifice, did they not always look for the purest of the breed? And was the life expectancy of a guide any longer than that of a Greek messenger?

Dr. Lyman does reboard the bus; he does leave this bus stop. The more hopeful of the Inge substitutes does not. The hero's guide, Virgil, who has seen Bo through all the rings of the Inferno, now abandons him at the edge of Paradise. He remains behind, and Inge gives him the curtain line. Because Grace will not leave anyone inside after she locks up, he has no choice.

> GRACE We're closing now, mister.
> VIRGIL *(Coming center)* Any place warm I could stay till eight o'clock?
> GRACE Now that the p'lice station's closed, I don't know where you could go, unless ya wanted to take a chance of wakin' up the man that runs the hotel.
> VIRGIL No--I wouldn't wanta be any trouble.
> GRACE There'll be a bus to Kanz City in a few minutes. I'll put the sign out and they'll stop.
> VIRGIL No, thanks. No point a goin' back there.
> GRACE Then I'm sorry, mister, but you're just left out in the cold. *(She carries a can of garbage out the rear door, leaving VIRGIL for the moment alone.)*
> VIRGIL *(To himself)* Well. . . that's what happens to some people. (Four Plays 219)

Virgil literally becomes one of the "People in the Wind". Perhaps the answer to the questions about these characters is all in how we ultimately define "hope". Do Bo and Cherie have more hope because they go on together? Inge obviously feels they are the characters here with the kind of strength called for by his recipe for love Is there, then, also hope for Dr. Lyman who travels on the same bus? Or is the hope with those who remain behind? With Grace, and Elma and ultimately with Virgil? The answer is unclear, but the situation is

reminiscent of a quotation from Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" which Inge was to use in his first screenplay:

> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;
> We will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind . . . .

In Bus Stop, the golden sacrifice is muted. It is almost healthy here. We see that Cherie has traded her innocence for a sham of a career; therefore Bo has taken her place. He is "...virgin enough for both of us." So it is Bo who is the gold here, the innocent purity. He can work his alchemy on Cherie, and together they can be happy. The sacrifice is made by Virgil, who is left to wait in the snow, delivered out the front door as the garbage is taken out the back. But there is an acceptance of that in his final line, because, as we all know, ". . . that's what happens to some people." In this play, he who makes the sacrifice seems to have less hope than others in his life. Doc in Sheba must deal with his addiction and work for a future. The hope lies in the fact that Lola is with him and eager to help now. Perhaps they can grow together. The hope is through her willingness to do the sacrificing now. In Picnic Rosemary sacrifices her pride to gain a husband, and Howard gives up his freedom to gain a wife. Hal finds a golden girl and makes love to her but feels inadequate and runs away. Not even Inge seems to know what Madge's sacrifice of her first love should cost. Here, in Bus Stop, Bo and Cherie are off to a hopeful future. Grace is left behind because she has made her choices about life, love and security. There is something inherent about those choices in order to enter a state of "Grace". She is at least content to "make do". Elma is not quite yet ready to step aboard the continuum, so she too remains behind, a sleeping princess for another play. Her would-be seducer, Dr. Lyman, will continue on; riding the bus or reliving the past or hiding in literature; and Virgil will wait for the next bus, perhaps to find another young innocent to guide through the labyrinth of an earth-bound, winter Inferno.

THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

In The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, the Inge character returns full-circle to whom he was in the very beginning of Inge's writing. The Inge character in this play, as in "Farther Off From Heaven", is not Rubin, the frustrated salesman, nor

is it Lottie's itinerant Husband. It isn't even Inge's purest golden boy, Sammy Goldenbaum. Inge is to be found in the child, Sonny, who collects pictures of movie stars and doesn't like to get dirty.

> Sonny Flood! His name is mud!
> Sonny runs home to Mama!
> Sonny plays with paper dolls!
> Sonny Flood, his name is mud! (Four Plays 231)

A major aspect of the play's structure is that the original focus seems to shift drastically with the single appearance of Sammy Goldenbaum. After his off-stage suicide is reported, everything seems to revolve around his presence, his effect upon all of the characters he has met only once, and upon his sacrifice. But his sacrifice cannot be traced to any of them. No one sacrifices Sammy, except William Inge. And Inge sacrifices Sammy to save Sonny, who, I contend, is Inge's image of himself. It is an interesting cycle if masochism can be seen as interesting.

Unlike most cycles it does at least have a beginning. It began with Inge's interview with Tennessee Williams in 1944. Audrey Wood introduces it this way:

> After seeing Menagerie in Chicago, Bill wrote the following in a still unpublished journal:
>
> I rode the train back to St. Louis and gave my experience in Chicago deep thought. Tennessee had shown me a dynamic example of the connection between art and life. I could see, from what he had told me of his youth and family life, how he had converted the raw material of his life into drama. I had been wanting to write plays myself, but I had never known where to look for material. I always tried to write like Noel Coward, with each attempt an embarrassing failure. Now I knew where to look for a play--inside myself.
>
> That spring in St. Louis, when the symphony season was over and my work on the paper had lessened, I sat down to write my own play, garnered from my memories of childhood. I had seen enough plays at the American Theatre, both good and bad, to have the courage to fail. What if it didn't turn out to be another Menagerie. I would at least write it. The play was a domestic comedy, based upon my early memories of my family and relatives. I called it "Farther Off From Heaven" from the sentimental little poem of Thomas Hood's. I dared to think that it was pretty good. I sent a copy off to Margo Jones in Dallas. I had met Margo when I was with Tennessee in Chicago and she had told me of her plans to

> start a professional theatre in Dallas. Tennessee happened to be visiting her at the time. They both read the play and telephoned me to tell me they liked it. Margo said she wanted to open her theatre with it. I was ecstatic. I now felt myself to be a playwright and to have a future. (Quoted in Wood 222)

"Farther Off From Heaven" is a "domestic comedy" which centres on a shy girl who is missing a front tooth. She seeks escape by playing the piano for her own amusement. The echoes of The Glass Menagerie are clear. Laura had a club-foot and played the victrola all day. Reenie's family tries to steer her toward people and partners and life experiences in order to help her over the awkward period. She has a blind date who helps her very much as Williams' Laura is helped in The Glass Menagerie by Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller. The supporting cast are all interesting variations of mid-western "types", "formed from pretty nostalgic memories of childhood" (Four Plays ix). By the final curtain, the girl achieves a kind of security which is personified in her first real smile.

In his preface to Four Plays, Inge himself outlines some of the progress he had made since that first play:

> Again, the story is very slight. I deliberately divert the audience from the main story in order to bring them back to it at the end of the play with a fresher viewpoint. In the play, I try to explore some of man's hidden fear in facing life and to show something of the hidden fears that motivate us all. There is a suicide in the play, of a young, homeless, part Jewish boy who has no sure connection with anyone in the world. Some people felt upon reading the play, and others upon first seeing it, that the announcement of the suicide came as too much of a shock; but every suicide I ever heard of came to me in the same way, with no preparation. I have never heard of a suicide that I expected. We always find the reasons for such events after they happen, in re-exploring the character to find motivations we had previously overlooked. It was this kind of dynamism I wanted most to achieve. And I felt also that maybe I was drawing a little on Christian theology to show something of the uniting effect human suffering can bring into our lives. (Four Plays ix)

Inge is not entirely successful in this attempt to "bring them back to it at the end of the play with a fresher viewpoint." The fact of Sammy's suicide described in the classic Greek manner by a messenger is too startling to dissolve from our consciousness in order to deal with the very ordinary problems of the Flood family.

The focus shifts in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs from the girl's "rites of passage", which it had been in "Farther Off From Heaven", to themes of repressed sexuality. Cora and Rubin, the parents, are estranged. She sees sex as a duty; he seeks his release elsewhere. Cora orders him out of the house and plans to move in with her sister, Lottie, whose husband is uninterested in sex. Lottie and her husband are almost what we expect will have happened to Rosemary and Howard from Picnic within a very short time of their marriage. Lottie is very envious of Cora because Cora's husband is a handsome and virile man. She goes so far as to deny Cora's request to move in with them:

> LOTTIE Call up Rubin and ask him to come back. Beg him to come back, if you have to get down on your knees. (Four Plays 276)

Cora is actually more concerned with her children, particularly with her son, than she is with her husband. And over the course of the play she realizes the error of this behavior for both the children and for herself.

The girl, Reenie, still exists, although her teeth are quite perfect in this version. She still plays the piano in moments of stress. She also has a blind date in this play with Sammy Goldenbaum, the son of a minor movie actress. Sammy is Jewish and is ordered out of the restricted country-club where the party is held. He takes his own life as a result, taking a train to Oklahoma city, registering at a hotel at 2:00 A.M. and jumping out of the fourteenth floor window of his room (291). This tragedy to a character the family has only met once manages to bring the family together. The plot this time is certainly a domestic exploration, but it is not a comedy.

Inge appears to have tried once more for an ensemble piece which had worked so well for him in the last two plays. This play, however, is about Sonny. Sammy's visit to the home to pick up Reenie for the party is devoted all but exclusively to the younger brother. Surely if the young man is here to date Reenie, he would be expected to spend more time with her and their friends than with her little brother. When Sammy arrives he is introduced first to Sonny:

> FLIRT Come in fellows. We're going to have to wait. *(PUNKY GIVENS and SAMMY GOLDENBAUM make a colorful entrance. Both are dressed in uniforms of lustrous blue, which fit them like smooth upholstery.)* Sammy, this is Sonny Flood, Reenie's little brother.

(SAMMY GOLDENBAUM steps forth correctly, his plumed headgear in his hand. He is a darkly beautiful young man of seventeen, with lustrous black hair, black eyes and a captivating smile. Yet, something about him seems a little foreign, at least in comparison with the Midwestern company in which he now finds himself. He could be a Persian prince, strayed from his native kingdom. But he has become adept over the years in adapting himself, and he shows an eagerness to make friends and to be liked.)

SAMMY Hi, Sonny!

SONNY *(Shaking hands)* Hi! (Four Plays 262)

It is Sonny who draws attention to Sammy's greatest problem:

SAMMY . . . I bet I've been in almost every military academy in the whole country. Well, I take that back. There's some I didn't go to. I mean. . . there's some that wouldn't take me.

SONNY *(Out of the innocent blue)* My mother says you're a Jew.

LOTTIE *(Aghast)* Sonny!

SAMMY Well. . . yes, Sonny. I guess I am. . . . (Four Plays 265)

SAMMY My father was Jewish. Mother told me. Mother isn't Jewish at all. Oh, my mother has the most beautiful blond hair. I guess I take after my father. . . in looks, anyhow. He was an actor, too, but he got killed in an automobile accident.

LOTTIE That's too bad. Sonny, I think you should apologize.

SONNY Did I say something bad?

SAMMY Oh, that's all right. It doesn't bother me that I'm Jewish. Not any more. I guess it used to a little. . . yes, it did used to a little. (Four Plays 266)

To ease the boy's discomfort, Sammy kneels before him:

SAMMY Wanta wild West ride, Sonny?
(He kneels on the floor, permitting SONNY to straddle his back. Then SAMMY kicks his feet in the air like a wild colt, as SONNY holds to him tight.) (Four Plays 266)

He even offers the boy his military sword to play with:

SONNY Where did you get those clothes?

SAMMY They gave them to me at the academy, Sonny. ...No. I take that back. They didn't give them to me. They never give you anything at that place. I paid for them. Plenty!

SONNY Why do you wear a sword?

SAMMY *(Pulls the sword from its sheath, like a buccaneer and goes charging about the room in search of imagined*

villains) I wear a sword to protect myself! See! To kill off all the villains in the world. . . .

SONNY *(Jumping up and down)* Can I have a sword? I want a sword.

SAMMY Do you, Sonny? Do you want a sword? Here, Sonny, I'll give you my sword, for all the good it'll do you. (Four Plays 267)

Even after meeting Reenie, Sammy is more interested in her little brother:

SAMMY *(Kneeling beside SONNY, as though to make himself a physical equal)* What'll we do now, Sonny? Are there any games you want to play? Do you want to fight Indians? or set bear traps? or go flying over volcanoes? or climb the Alps?

SONNY *(Eagerly)* Yes. . . yes.

SAMMY Gee, so do I, Sonny. But we can't. Not tonight anyway. What else can we do?

SONNY I can show you my movie stars.

SAMMY I've had enough of movie stars. What else?

SONNY I can speak a piece.

SAMMY You can? *(Jumps to his feet)* Hey, everyone! Stop the music. Sonny's going to speak a piece. (Four Plays 268)

And the piece Sonny chooses is Hamlet's dissertation on suicide: "To be or not to be. . . ." which ends with the phrase ". . .For in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause. . . " (Four Plays 269) before the overlap of other dialogue obscures the remainder of the soliloquy. Sammy invites Sonny to the Country Club party and then manages to calm the boy down after his mother and sister forbid him to go:

SAMMY It was wrong of me to suggest that you go to the party tonight. You're not old enough yet. You'll be old enough someday though, and then you can go to all the parties you like.

SONNY Can I?

SAMMY Sure. Now, I tell you what I'll do. I'll gather up all the favors I can find at the party. Want me to? And I'll give them to your sister to bring home to you. And then you can have a party here all by yourself. Would you like that? You can throw a big party in Sammy's honor, without any old grownups around to interfere. Will that make you happy?

SONNY Yes, yes.

SAMMY O. K. Are we still buddies?

SONNY Yes.

SAMMY Forever and ever?

SONNY Forever and ever.
(Sonny impulsively hugs him.) (Four Plays 273-274)

And then Sammy leaves, never to return.

It is every young boy's dream that a handsome man will befriend him and teach him and make him special. It is also every male homosexual's desire and William Inge's nightmare. He allows his representative character to be promised all that is pure and innocent and exciting by his hero, and then before anything could ever be expected to happen sexually, he sacrifices the object of his affection. Sammy's death makes it possible for Sonny to grow up. He finds the courage to confront the boys who taunt him, and he makes friends with his sister by sharing the party favors Sammy has sent for him.

REENIE I didn't know Sammy had even remembered the favors until I started to go. Then I went to find my coat and there they were, sticking out of my pocket. At the very moment he was putting them there. . . he must have had in mind doing what he did.
SONNY *(With a burst of generosity)* You! You keep the favors, Reenie.
REENIE He promised them to you.
SONNY Just the same. . . . you keep them, Reenie. (Four Plays 302)

The last we see of Sonny is when he smashes his piggy-bank to get the money to escape to the movies with his sister.

SONNY When I feel bad, I just have to go to the movies. I just have to.
REENIE . . .Sonny! Mother told you you had to save that money.
SONNY I don't care. She's not going to boss me for the rest of my life. It's my money and I've got a right to spend it. (Four Plays 302-303)

Thus, by the end of The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Inge is still very close to The Glass Menagerie, in which Tom's escape was always to go to the movies and his greatest friend was his memory of his sister.

The twin themes of entrapment and hope are as clearly wedded here as they are anywhere in Inge's work. Sonny (Inge) has hope in that he can now face the future as an individual, but he is entrapped even further by the fantasies he has constructed around his movie stars. Now one of them has touched his

own life, and what he sees as freedom may be a trap of the mind which could prove to be much darker than the proverbial dark at the top of the staircase.

This play marked the crossroads of Inge's career or, rather, the end of a cycle. It had brought him full circle from his first play, it was the fourth in an unbroken series of solid Broadway runs, and he had the respect and success he so desperately sought. Like Sonny he had come through a series of obstacles and seemed to be at the peak of his powers. He was to realize only three other productions on Broadway, and they would be in steadily descending acceptance both in the eyes of the critics and of the public.

There is an element of guilt connected with Inge's view of love. It is a sin to surrender innocence. That sin will be punished. Something will have to be sacrificed if you sin, and once you have had to sacrifice you are never as pure, as deserving again. There is more to that philosophy than simply ". . . drawing a little on Christian theology. . . " (Four Plays ix). There is a private view of this continuum at work in these plays. I suspect it has to do with the commonly accepted fact that Inge was homosexual and probably more to do with the guilt and fears that that particular choice occasioned at the time he was growing up and writing his plays. A great fear has always been the effect of early sexual experience upon the young. It is difficult to read the scenes between Sonny and Sammy without feeling that a great deal is being left unsaid. I have no suspicion that Sammy or Sonny were working towards a liaison that either of them planned or of which they were even particularly aware. But there is something stronger developing here than simple horseplay with your date's younger brother.

The play itself brought Inge full circle with his writing. He was working the same theme in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs that he had begun with years earlier in "Farther Off From Heaven". It is certainly a possibility that he was now freer to explore the feelings he had been repressing at that earlier time.

Inge was never obvious about his sexuality. And his privacy has been respected. No one writes about his liaisons, about his friends or his lovers, and no one has stepped forward to tell about Inge the sort of tales that abound about Tennessee Williams. I contend that part of the reason for our acceptance of Inge's choice without this kind of collaborating evidence lies within the texts of the plays themselves. The moments like those between the youngsters in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs begin to escalate with this play. The three that follow explore more deeply the psychological explanations that were offered at the time for homosexual behaviors. The kinds of hints that Inge began to provide in his

writing to his own feelings were largely connected with the guilt we have already seen connected with the sexual act, with the surrender of virginity, with the sacrifices that are required to atone for sensual pleasure. The moments that ring with this kind of guilt are probably largely responsible for our acceptance of Inge's sexual choice as a fact; they are also at least partially responsible for the reception that his later plays received. In the three plays that follow we are to see more evidence of Inge's exploration of that guilt and the feelings that fostered it. What happened to William Inge may very well be that he began to tell the truth about what was bothering him. At the time of The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs, he was beginning to be very concerned about the type of existence he was living and what that could mean about his future. One of his later characters is to caution another about that concern:

> . . . I think that at this particular time, you might be a little more afraid than you realize. . . . you can no longer be a boy. . . . It's a terrifying step to take, ... some of us never take it, but just grow up into old boys, and go to our graves without dignity or bearing. . . . [5]

My contention is that Inge realized that the person he recognized as himself in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs was the person he had been years earlier when he first worked on that plot. He was Sonny, and he was still a boy with his movie-star fantasies (which were now actually being realized through the production of films based upon his successful Broadway plays). But he was not a boy anymore. He was forty-four years old when Stairs was premiered. And some of the urges that he was feeling and to which he was increasingly attracted could no longer be dismissed as boyish fantasies. It was time to decide whether he was a guide as Virgil had been in Bus Stop or if he was a corrupted educator, like Lyman, in danger of dismissal. It was, in short, high time to explore some of the options he had as a mature man and a successful American playwright before he became "The Boy in the Basement".

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[5] William Inge, Where's Daddy? (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1966) 31. Subsequent references in the text to this work will be identified as "Daddy?".

CHAPTER V THE FINAL PLAYS

A theme which is introduced to Inge's audiences in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs is that of the love between a mother and her son. It is a theme which he had explored earlier only in "The Basement" but at which none of his successful Broadway plays even hint. In The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs, he makes the relationship between Cora and Sonny a major focus of the plot. Cora actually seems more concerned about her son than she is about her husband or their marriage. This concern is, in fact, a major reason behind her quarrel with Rubin:

> RUBIN You're always kissin' and makin' over the boy until I sometimes wonder who's top man around here.
> CORA Rubin!
> RUBIN I just said I wonder.
> CORA If I kept the kids too close to me, it's only because you weren't there, and I had to have someone close to me. I had to have someone.
> RUBIN You're like an old mare Pa used to have on the ranch. Never wanted to give up her colts. By God, she'd keep 'em locked inside her and make all us men dig inside her with our hands to get 'em out. She never wanted to let 'em go. (Four Plays 228)

Cora dotes upon Sonny and is basically over-protective of him. Her warning turns immediately into the kind of buffer she has made of herself in order to stand between her son and the often unfair challenges of his reality:

> CORA Oh, God, some day you kids are going to be sorry. When you can't even get along with people in your own family, how can you expect to get along with people out in the world? *(Goes to the window and looks out, protectively)* Poor Sonny, every time he leaves the house, those neighborhood bullies pick on him. I guess they've all gone home now. (Four Plays 240)

Earlier in the act, she has actually tried to fight the battle for him:

> BOYS' VOICES
> Sonny Flood! His name is mud!
> Sonny runs home to Mama!
> Sonny plays with paper dolls!
> Sonny Flood, his name is mud!

CORA See there! *(She jumps up nervously and runs outside to face her son's accosters)* You boys run along. My Sonny hasn't done anything to hurt you. You go home now or I'll call your mothers, every last one of you. You should be ashamed of yourselves, picking on a boy who's smaller than you are.

(SONNY comes running into the house now. It is hard to discern his feelings.) (Four Plays 231)

When she is alone with Sonny, Cora's affection overflows:

CORA People distrust you if you don't play the same games they do, Sonny. It's the same after you grow up.

SONNY I'm not going to play games just to make them like me.

CORA *(Suddenly warm and affectionate)* Come to me, Sonny. I wish I understood you better, boy.

SONNY I don't see why.

CORA *(Caressing him)* No, I don't suppose you do. You're a speckled egg, and the old hen that laid you can't help wondering how you got in the nest. But I love you, Sonny. More than anything else in the world.

SONNY Mom, can I go to a movie tonight? (Four Plays 234)

As usual, when Sonny finds his reality too difficult to understand or to deal with, he takes refuge in the escapist world of his movie-star photos or by trying to reach his dream world of the movies. The most obvious example of the effect of the mother-son relationship is the influence it has had upon the memories of the character of Sonny's mentor, Sammy Goldenbaum, who actually grew up in the world of the movie-star:

SAMMY . . . But you mustn't misunderstand about my mother. She's really a very lovely person. I guess every boy thinks his mother is very beautiful, but my mother really is. She tells me in every letter she writes how sorry she is that we can't be together more, but she has to think of her work. One time we were together, though. She met me in San Francisco once, and we were together for two whole days. She let me take her to dinner and to a show and to dance. Just like we were sweethearts. It was the most wonderful time I ever had. . . . (Four Plays 271)

Sammy's suicide cannot be divorced in the minds of the audience from this earlier monologue. Although Inge intended the news of his death to serve as the incident which allows the characters in Rubin Flood's family to reassess their own values and relationships (Four Plays ix), the violence of the sacrifice of this fascinating character is the single most lasting impression in the play.

Having explored Inge's one-act plays, we are reminded of Mrs. Scranton's frantic reaction to her son's betrayal of her love:

> I think I even loved him more than I loved my own husband, for my son's infant love was innocent and pure, and demanded no fleshly act to satisfy its need. (Short Plays 49)

In this play, Inge lays the groundwork for an exploration of the problems created by a strong bond between mothers and sons. In the three plays which ended his Broadway career, the playwright was to explore further variations on this theme.

A LOSS OF ROSES

This play actually began as a vehicle for a triangle of performers: the mother, Helen Baird; her son, Kenny; and her former young friend, Lila. The role of Helen became less focal, according to Harold Clurman, after the loss of a chosen actress, Shirley Booth.[1] Inge actually stated that the role should have been even less important. In his preface to the published edition, he writes:

> I believe now that the most serious mistake I made was to permit the New York production to end with the parting scene between the mother and son, Helen and Kenny. As first conceived, the play ended rightly with the departure of Lila, and thus the ending should have remained. For it is really Lila's play, and to refuse her the ending brought about a change in the emphasis on character that confused all the other values of the play. I am only sorry that I could not see this until it was too late. But in this edition, I have been able to right the wrong that was done to this already mistreated character.[2]

As in the cases of his more successful plays, Inge was obviously persuaded to modify his original script:

> . . . During production time, I was forced to do a great deal of writing on the characters of Helen and Kenny, making their relationship clearer. Some of this writing was made necessary because so much material had been cut from the first half of the play that I had to make explicit many dramatic values that I had intended to be merely implied. Yet, some of these rewrites were good, and I have incorporated the good ones into this edition. (Roses vii)

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1 Harold Clurman, All People are Famous (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1974) 145.

2 William Inge, A Loss of Roses (Montreal: Bantam Books, 1963) viii. Subsequent references in the text to this work will be identified as "Roses".

Despite his defense of the rewrites, Inge further admits:

> The production of A Loss of Roses was a complete failure. And yet, I have never gone into production with a play in which I had such complete confidence. Perhaps I was too confident of the play, for I could never really believe that it would not succeed until the last few days of our out-of-town engagement, when suddenly I realized that the play I had thought I had written was not happening on the stage. (Roses vii - viii)

Certainly part of the problem Inge describes lies in his failure to resolve the conflict within the twenty-one-year-old Kenny, a conflict which exists in the character's own mind between the two types of women in his life. At the beginning of the play, Kenny's view of women is divided between the mother who has raised him and the girls he picks up for a single evening; to exaggerate the extension, between the sacred and the profane. An immediate problem presented by this pattern is that one of the women herein is the character's own mother. In the published edition, Inge only hints at the Oedipal undertones:

> HELEN Kenny, I just can't feed you like I used to. Can't you understand that? You keep expecting me to do things and be something that I simply can't be, any more. And you seem to hold it against me that I don't cook for you any more, that I no longer wash your socks and shirts. That hurts me, Kenny. (Roses 9)
>
> KENNY I've always tried to help you since Dad died, haven't I? Since I've been old enough. I do all the things around here that he'd do, don't I? Or try to. I mow the lawn and take care a the furnace and burn the trash. What'd you do without me?
> HELEN I'd miss you very much, Kenny.
> KENNY Then why hurry things? I got a good job and I could look after you, Mom. You wouldn't have to work at all, if you din want to. . .
> HELEN Oh, Kenny! I wouldn't think of letting you support me.
> KENNY Why not? I'd be glad to. *(He is beginning to soften)* I don't really mean it, Mom, when I put up a big squawk about my share of the expenses. Honest, I'd be glad to look after everything, if you'd stay home and . . . look after things, and . . .
> HELEN . . . and cook better dinners for you?
> KENNY Well, yah! And quit bossing me all the time.
> *(Playfully, he puts an arm around her and tries to kiss her, but she withdraws like a shy maiden)*

HELEN Now, Kenny!
KENNY What's wrong with showing a little affection?
HELEN You're too old to still be making love to me like you did when you were a baby.
KENNY Judas Priest! It doesn't mean anything.
HELEN Kenny I couldn't let myself be dependent on you.
KENNY Ya din feel that way when Dad was alive. You din work when he was alive. I can look after you just as well as he did.
HELEN Kenny, you're not your father. Maybe I'm afraid of needing you. Did you ever stop to think of that? I have to be practical about things. I know you'll want to get married some day, and how would your wife feel if you had a mother to support? I've got to be prepared for the day you leave, and I'd feel a lot better seeing you married to some nice, sensible girl than . . . picking up those cheap girls down at the drugstore and . . .
KENNY A-men! *(He stalks away.)* (Roses 12-13)

In a conversation with Jelly, his buddy from high-school days, Kenny categorizes the women in his life:

JELLY You never take anyone to the movies but your old lady.
KENNY I don't put any of the bags we pick up in the same class with my mom.
JELLY Well, my mom's OK, too, but I don't intend to marry her. (Roses 16)

These two visions of women seem to come together in the person of Lila, a younger friend of Helen's, who represents the same maturity as the mother.

LILA . . . I used to look after you when you were a baby. I fed you your bottle and changed your didies, and bounced you on my knee to keep you from crying. I was kind of a substitute mother for you, Kenny. . . . (Roses 24)

She also, as an experienced actress, represents an extension of the sensuality he seeks from the girls in the town.

For Lila, who is between engagements with a down-at-the-heel acting troupe, Helen's life looks very desirable. In fact, it has always seemed like the ideal existence to a girl who has had no success with her family or her relationships. Lila remembers:

LILA . . . I never told you, Helen, but I guess I can now. I had the wildest crush on your husband that a silly, young girl could possibly have. *(HELEN smiles)* He was my model. I told myself that I was

gonna have a husband like him some day. And I measured every man I met by your Kenneth. (Roses 32)

Kenneth, Lila's dream-ideal and Helen's former husband, gave his life to save his son, Kenny, from drowning (Roses 34). Lila sees him re-incarnated in the twenty-one-year-old Kenny (Osiris returning for another season), and Kenny sees in Lila the purity of his mother within a woman more sophisticated than the easy girls in town. With Lila everything is possible, and the taboo of incest is not even an issue.

Perhaps the mention of incest as a theme here seems too strong. But it is not imagined; Inge's references are subtle, but they are present. Lila too has been exposed to incestuous situations. Her first marriage to Ed Comiskey brought on the attentions of her father-in-law:

LILA . . . And then, when Ed was gone, old Vincent started coming to my room, trying to force himself on me.
HELEN Your husband's father?
LILA I told you you'd never heard of people like them. Oh, he was a horrible old man. I just couldn't stand him. He tried to force me to make love to him. . . in all sorts of ways that. . . that just made me sick, Helen. (Roses 44-45)

After Lila's aborted suicide attempt, Helen reveals at least the surface of her fears separately to both Kenny and Lila:

HELEN I've loved you as much as I dared, Son.
KENNY Oh, sure!
HELEN If I'd loved you any more, I'd have destroyed you.
(Stifling her tears, HELEN runs back to her room, leaving KENNY with a feeling of shock and despair.) (Roses 108)

HELEN ... Last night you told me of your sins, Lila, and I regretted them. But you're fortunate in one way. Your sins have always been out in the open where you can see them. Some people hide their sins so deeply in their hearts, they never know they're there. (Roses 112)

If we are to believe his foreword to the published edition of A Loss of Roses, Inge found it difficult to concentrate upon three characters. Although his previous scripts had been hailed by actors as ensemble pieces, this concentration upon the triangle, or upon the boy and his dilemma as represented by the two visions of "woman", proved difficult. Inge himself seems to opt for Lila as the protagonist, although the more natural candidate would seem to be Kenny.

The play splits between these two, who are obviously attracted to each other. The single time they make love is the climax to major decisions about their separate futures. Kenny is ready to move into a room at Jelly's house, and Lila is preparing to return to her career. When Lila discovers that her lover, Ricky, has arranged for her new career to be in blue movies and live sex shows, she throws him out with Kenny's help. Comforting her leads to promises of caring for her forever, and they make love. The next morning, Kenny awakens from a dream about his mother:

> KENNY I . . . I dreamed that someone died.
> LILA Who?
> KENNY It was. . . Mom.
> LILA Oh!
> KENNY She had to die, for some reason. She had to. It was terrible. (Roses 98)

This is very reminiscent of Lola's dream in Come Back, Little Sheba when she realizes that in order to continue on with her life she will have to give up any hope of finding her little innocent white dog again. This time the sacrifice involves a human, and the idea is chilling even though it is never followed to any actual incident involving his mother. What he does destroy is his promise to Lila that they will continue as a pair. Almost as if he realizes that what attracts him to Lila is that part of her that represents his own mother, he eases himself away from any commitment. Lila resorts to slashing her wrist in the bathroom. This sacrifice does not succeed either; Helen returns home and binds up the superficial wound. Within ten pages the play ends. Kenny is now planning not only to leave his home and his mother, but his job and his town. Lila agrees to Ricky's plans for her future in pornography, and Helen is left alone.

Why should the sexual union of these two occasion such negative life choices, especially in Lila's case? Why should she be punished for Kenny's realization? Is Inge again sacrificing his leading lady?

The title presents some clue. It reminds us of his use of the roses in Jackie's hair in his earlier one-act "Glory in the Flower". In that play, the heroine came into a recognition of her own present needs and abandoned her dreams for a resurrected past. She also managed to keep her self-respect and her dignity in order to build a future for herself. She dropped the roses in her hair on the doorstep as she left the Paradise. They were her sacrifice in return for a better understanding of reality. In A Loss of Roses, the flowers are never actually

mentioned until the final scene, in which a small child carries roses to her teacher on the first day of school. This reminds Lila of her own first day at school and how she asked for the roses back after a misunderstanding with the teacher:

> LILA . . . I told Teacher I wanted back my roses. But she wouldn't give them to me. She shook her finger and said, when I gave away lovely presents, I couldn't expect to get them back. . . I guess I never learned that lesson very well. There's so many things I still want back. (Roses 114-115)

What constituted the "roses" of Lila's life? Her virginity? Surely Inge has made it quite clear that went long ago. Her childhood? Her ability to love and trust? Her dignity? Her self-respect? All of the above? The image is ambiguous and does not help to solve the problems presented by the play. If "the loss of roses", the inability to retrieve gifts once they have been given, is the theme of the play, we need more clear examples. The other side of the coin exists in the play as well when Kenny tries to give his mother an expensive watch which she refuses. The watch is offered in genuine affection and respect. Helen cannot take it because it costs her son too much money. What does she cost him by refusing it? Or is Inge exploring the dichotomies between giving and taking? Kenny, who has always stolen things, finally saves his money and purchases a birthday gift for his mother. It is rejected, and he reverts to stealing Lila's trust by offering the security of marriage? Quite simply, the themes are not clearly developed. Something has clearly interfered with the through line, and even Inge (in his introduction) seems unable to put his finger on what that "something" happened to be.

In each of his previous plays, some hope has existed for at least one of the characters at the end of the play. As this play ends, however, there is little hope for any of the characters. They are all on the thresholds of new lives, but they carry the guilt of old roses, and it is hard to imagine a positive outcome for any of them.

NATURAL AFFECTION

In his next play, William Inge gives voice to one of the unsettling problems he has explored so often -- why do some men have trouble making a commitment:

> DONNIE What was my father like?

SUE He was a good-natured boy. Good-looking. Liked a good time. He was a bellhop at the Hotel LaSalle when I met him. And I worked at the counter in the coffee shop.

DONNIE Why'd he leave? He get mad about something?

SUE No Donnie. We were all set to get married 'n' everything, and then he went into a panic when he found out you were on the way. He was scared to death of settling down and being a father.

DONNIE Di'n' he like me?

SUE He never waited long enough to see what you were like. He just took out, and I never saw him again. Oh, it's a strange kinda sickness in the world today, Donnie, that seems to make men afraid of tying themselves down to a wife and kids, that makes men wanta run free as goats all their lives.

DONNIE *(With sudden viciousness.)* I hate him.

SUE *(Surprised by Donnie's anger.)* Donnie!

DONNIE If he was here now, I'd . . . I'd hate him enough to kill him. I'd. . .

SUE Now, Donnie! Don't talk that way. Your father di'n' do anything to spite you. He was just afraid. Don't ya understand? He was just afraid.

DONNIE I'm sorry, Mom. I di'n' mean to blow my top.

SUE Goodness, I don't like to see you lose control of yourself that way, Donnie. It's not good for you. Do you have any of those pills the Doctor gave you?

The two sides to man's nature which Inge identified earlier in Bus Stop by splitting a major character into two parts have been re-united in this play as they were, to a certain degree, in A Loss of Roses. In "People in the Wind", Inge's character, Man, was both violent and tender. To make Bo an innocent in Bus Stop, Inge divided the character of "Man" in two (Bo and Virgil), making Bo the innocent raised in the light of Virgil's strength. To contrast with this force for good, Inge also chose to darken the character of the professor from the one-act play and turned Dr. Lyman not only a into drunk but into the sort of teacher who dallies with the students. Inge has him try to ensnare Elma, the innocent young waitress. We then watch the epic struggle of the light versus the dark for the innocents among these travellers at the bus stop. If we espouse this symbolism for the play, we would question whether it has such a happy ending after all. Bo leaves with Cherie on the same vehicle as Dr. Lyman, and the journey continues on its way to Hell? or Paradise? It depends upon whether we can believe that Lyman's self-disgust is a form of redemption or not. If it is redeeming, then all the passengers are heading towards a fresh start, Lyman included. If not, then Inge

has foreshadowed their fate by sending them off with the more pessimistic of the two guides.

Virgil ends up in the snowy night, into which Elma has also just exited. They are separate, the optimistic philosopher and the youthful innocent, in the same white wilderness; one unsure of his immediate destination, the other unclear about when she too will leave this bus stop and curious about what her destination will be when she does.

In A Loss Of Roses, we see these two sides united in the same character. Kenny has a sympathetic and tender "light" side and a dark side as well, neither of which he fully comprehends. That which he sees as good is feared by his own mother, who seems unclear as to where the line between light and dark exists in her growing son. The line blurs even more when another woman enters the picture and Kenny is able to use his "light" side to draw Lila to him. Once threatened, however, he can quickly revert to the dark side and protect himself from involvement. That exposure to the narrow margin between dark and light is enough to throw them both into the protection that the defenses of the dark side of their natures seem to offer.

In Natural Affection, the mother-son relationship is explored in relation to rivalry with another man. Sue Barker hopes to marry Bernie Slovenk, the man with whom she is living. The visit of her son, Donnie, complicates matters. Donnie is "on vacation" from a reform facility. The homosexual advances of a guard make it imperative that he gain his mother's permission to stay in Chicago with her. Bernie has no desire for a teen-age "son", and Sue is caught in the middle.

Inge further complicates the plot with the introduction of the neighbors across the hall whose partnership seems tenuous at best. Both Vince and Claire seem to be mesmerized by Bernie. The husband makes a comic pass at Bernie when he is drunk --

> VINCE Merry Christmas, Donnie! *(He kisses Donnie.)* Merry Christmas, Bernie! *(He kisses Bernie.)* Y'all wanna know somethin'? I really like ole Bernie. Ole Bernie's the best friend I got. I think Bernie's a real special guy.
> BERNIE You're a fag at heart, Vince. Why don't ya admit it? *(Vince laughs uproariously.)* (Affection 51) --

and later admits that he is well aware of his wife's intentions as well:

BERNIE *(Helping him into his shoes)* Gimme your other foot.

VINCE I'm fifty years old now, Bernie. When ya get to be fifty, ya stop and think. Ya know ya only got five, ten years more, twenty at best unless ya wanna be a goddam octogenarian. I'm scared, Bernie. I lived all this time and it hasn't meant anything. I'm still knockin' around, gettin' drunk and spendin' my money faster'n I can make it. I'll prob'ly die in the poorhouse. I'm scared. I can't seem to hold onta anything. Life's slipping away and I never learned what it's all about. I dunno how to live. I oughta have someone teach me. I dunno how to live.

BERNIE Shut up. I'd still trade places with ya.

VINCE Look, Bernie, let's get something straight. I know you been playin' round with Claire. Now don't make up any stories, for God's sake, or I'll really get sore. Just tell me the truth, Bernie.

BERNIE Yah, Vince. It happened a few times.

VINCE Sure, I knew. I just wanted you to tell me. I di'n' want ya doin' anything 'hind my back. I like you too much, Bernie. *(He grabs Bernie"s hand and squeezes it.)*

BERNIE I like you, Vince.

VINCE It's awful hard for two men to show they like each other, isn't it?

BERNIE Maybe. (Affection 58-59)

Sue is disgusted by the behavior of both neighbors but puts up with it because of her own need for Bernie.

SUE Vince left a present for ya.

BERNIE *(Unwrapping it.)* Great.

SUE He's having trouble with his income tax again. Says he's going to jail.

BERNIE Hey! This smells good.

SUE *(Sniffing.)* Just like Russian leather.

BERNIE I like old Vince.

SUE It's pretty obvious he likes you, too.

BERNIE Whata ya gettin' at?

SUE I mean it's just not natural for a man to be as thoughtful of another man as he is of you.

BERNIE Vince gives me a present, so he's queer. Is that the way you reason?

SUE I'm not criticizing him. I was only wondering about him, the way he acts at times.

BERNIE I think Vince is so mixed up, he don't know what he is. *(Smelling the lotion.)* Hey! I like this stuff. It smells great.

SUE *(Hugging him.)* Mmm, you're the greatest thing alive, honey. Did I ever tell ya?

BERNIE Course I am. Did ya lock the door? (Affection 38)

Sue only forces Bernie's hand when Donnie informs her of the affair with Claire. Bernie chooses to leave, allowing Donnie to assume he can now appeal to his mother in order to stay with her and avoid a return to the reform facility. She rejects him in much the same way as Helen rejected Kenny in A Loss of Roses:

> SUE Bernie loves me very much.
> DONNIE So do I, Mom. I'll show ya, too. When I get my job, I'll work real hard. I'll take care of ya, Mom. I'll buy all the beautiful things in the world. You'll never have to work again.
> SUE That's little-boy talk, Donnie.
> DONNIE *(As though wooing her -- his face close to hers.)* And we can be together all the time, can't we, Mom? I can take ya places, to shows and things, and to all the swell restaurants, and we could even take a trip together. Wouldn't that be great, Mom? To sail off on a cruise together, just you'n me and see all the sights.
> SUE *(A little apprehensive of his nearness.)* Don't come so close to me, Donnie.
> DONNIE I still love ya, Mom. Just as much as when I was a kid back in the orphanage. I still believed in God 'n' everything, and I used to pray we could be together. I thought you were the most wonderful woman in all the world, and I wanted us to be together forever 'n' ever. *(Sue suddenly comes to her decision. She twists away from Donnie and runs to the closet.)*
> SUE I'm going to get him.
> DONNIE *(Panicked.)* Mom!
> SUE I can't go back to living alone. I lived alone a long time after your father left me. I'm not going to live that way again.
> DONNIE *(Trying to embrace her.)* You got me, Mom. I can be just as much company as Bernie. *(He tries to kiss her.)*
> SUE Don't do that, Donnie.
> DONNIE I di'n mean anything bad.
> SUE I can't keep you, Donnie. I'm sorry. (Affection 67)

The echoes of this scene ring back to Sammy Goldenbaum's monologue about his relationship with his beautiful movie-star mother. This time the sentiments are not memories, they are spoken to the object of the affection, and they are met with immediate rejection. Sammy had not quite figured out that he was in a military school so that his starlet mother could avoid the obviously embarrassing problem of the existence of a child of his age. Donnie is told point-blank that his mother doesn't want him. Immediately after the section quoted above, Sue leaves in search of Bernie. She spits out a final rejection: "...Let go! I'm not

going to give up the rest of my life to keep a worthless kid I never wanted in the first place. Quit hanging on me, Donnie!" (Affection 68) and leaves Donnie alone.

In less than half a page, the play ends. A drunken woman emerges from Vince's apartment and wanders into the room where Donnie lies sobbing on the sofa:

> WOMAN Where's Bernie? *(Seeing Sue's door open, she enters.)* Where's that big Pollack Bernie? *(She sees Donnie prostrate on the sofa.)* Well. . . . whose li'l boy are you? *(She goes to him. Donnie makes no move.)* Whatsa matter, honey? Did somebody hurt your feelings?
>
> DONNIE Go 'way.
>
> WOMAN *(Turning his face to her.)* Mmm, you're cute. *(She kisses him on the mouth.)* I could go for a kid like you. C'mon, sonny. Be nice to mama.
>
> DONNIE *(Savagely.)* Get out!
>
> WOMAN Be nice to mama. Be nice. *(Donnie jumps up, frightened, and starts to run off, but the woman holds him.)* Where ya goin', honey? Stay here and be nice. *(Donnie hits her, knocking her to the floor, behind the sofa. She screams. His rage unleashed now, he grabs the butcher knife from the kitchen table and stabs her numerous times. When his homicidal fit is ended, he stands and looks down at his deed, his body shaking. He starts to run out the door when an idea occurs to him. He returns to the phonograph and plays the twist record at full blast. Calmer now, he goes to the refrigerator, drinks from a container of milk, then puts on his topcoat and walks out of the apartment forever, the twist music still blasting behind him.) CURTAIN.* (Affection 68)

The woman in the scene is anonymous, but she is certainly identifiable with the mother. She refers to herself as "mama" and begs that Donnie be "nice to mama". The action is hideous in itself but becomes more horrifying because of the implication of matricide and the terrifying menace of the boy's final calm. The ending is certainly shocking, primarily because of the violence, but even more so because it solves nothing and effectively abandons all the characters.

Again we see, as we did earlier in A Loss Of Roses, that there is no hope for any of these people. The darker side of their natures, the side which governs lust and rage and violence, dominates in all cases. Sue repeats her pursuit of Bernie, who obviously will not change his life-style; he is to be related to, he shares nothing. Vince and Claire continue a cycle of meaningless relationships within the frame of their sham marriage; and Donnie, by this irrational act and his

calm resolution, abandons himself to a life of running until he is caught and returned to the facility and Stubby (or to a more lethal facility and even more violent treatment). Or is the milk he drinks symbolic of another libation? Is this his modern hemlock taken before he takes his own life? Again the through-line of the play which will illuminate Inge's themes through the actions and reactions of his characters is sacrificed to a single violent action. This time, however, that action takes place on stage with only a sofa to mask it from the audience.

At least when Inge sacrificed characters at the end of other plays, we could see some sense of retribution. Sammy's death in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs was designed to provide a means through which the other characters could come together. Lila's suicide attempt fails in A Loss Of Roses, leaving Kenny's conscience free of at least a death. This woman appears for the first time only seconds before she surrenders her life. She is a faceless sacrifice. But to what? To the problem of a son's love for his mother? To rejection? To guilt? To all of the above? Again we are left with an ending but with no clear resolution, and no sense of hope for any of the futures involved.

As we have seen, Inge often had problems with endings. There is a famous show-business story involving Inge and the ending of this play at the time of its premiere. In his autobiography, Slings and Arrows (Theater in My Life), Robert Lewis labels it as "one of the definitive show business stories". He describes it as having been passed on to him by Lillian Hellman, who was interrupted during a dinner party she was giving in 1963. The interruption was a telephone call from fellow playwright, William Inge, whom she had never actually met.

> "Oh, Miss Hellman." The voice at the other end sounded urgent. "This is William Inge. I'm in trouble, and you're the only one who can help me."
>
> "Well," Lillian said, "I am at dinner, but what is it?"
>
> "I go into rehearsal this week with my new play, Natural Affection, and I have written two possible third acts. I can't make up my mind which to use. You are such a great constructionist, I'm sure if you'd read them both, you could advise me. I'd trust you."[3]

Miss Hellman agreed to think about it and took Inge's number so she could call him the next day with her decision. Lewis continues to describe the anguish which Hellman described to him, the anguish of whether or not to help a fellow

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3 Robert Lewis, Slings and Arrows (Theatre in my Life) (New York: Stein and Day, 1984) 255.

playwright, of whether or not she could actually be of any help and the very considerable problems involved in the time it would require that she take from her own work:

> . . . this little job will require reading two versions of his play. Then I'll probably have to make some kind of breakdown and analysis of the scenes. I'll have to meet with him and give him the reasons for my decision after I make it. It'll get me way off the track of my own work. (Lewis 256)

After further agonizing over whether or not to actually enter into the requested collaboration, Hellman finally decided in favor of helping a fellow dramatist out of a self-confessed jam. She waited until a decent hour the next day and placed the promised return call to Inge.

> "Hello," moaned the sleepy voice at the other end. Lillian felt a pang of guilt at having wakened the stricken author.
> "This is Lillian Hellman," said Lillian Hellman.
> "Who?"
> "Hellman, Lillian Hellman, you called me last night about helping you with your play."
> "Oh, yes." The voice was finally waking up. "It's sweet of you to call back but you needn't have bothered. You see after I hung up on you, an actor friend of mine, Mendy Wager, came by, and he told me which act to use." (Lewis 256)

If nothing else, this certainly is, as Lewis labelled it, one of the definitive show-business stories. If true, it says a good deal about Inge at a crucial point in his career. Since the story is claimed for the year 1963 and the frantic Inge is quoted by Ms Hellman as being about to "go into rehearsal this week with my play Natural Affection", someone's memory is at fault. The opening night of Natural Affection on Broadway (at the Booth theater) was the very last day of January (the thirty-first) in that year, 1963. To have begun rehearsals and opened in the same month seems a little rapid even for New York in the early sixties. Of course, it could have been the actual Broadway rehearsals after all the other out-of-town try-outs were over. That the play was in trouble no one would question. That final act was notoriously lambasted by every major critic; it resulted in one of the most embarrassing critical ravagings ever accorded a major playwright on Broadway. [4]

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[4] Some examples: ". . . Natural Affection . . . is about people whose emotional and psychic health is anything but certifiable." (Howard Taubman, New York Times); "Inge and Richardson

WHERE'S DADDY?

Inge's final play on Broadway contains another incarnation of the mother-son motif as well. However, in Where's Daddy?[5] this theme, like much of the rest of the play itself, is cluttered with disguises. There are two parent-child relationships; Teena and Tom are expecting a baby and receive visits from the people who raised them: Teena's mother and Tom's former mentor, Pinky. What would initially appear to be a mother-daughter, father-son situation is clouded by the ambiguity of the character of Pinky. Inge makes it clear that there has been no physical relationship between Tom and Pinky, but the boy has been all but adopted by the homosexual: educated, dressed, cared for and sponsored. Pinky is not Tom's former lover, nor is he a father-figure for the boy.

> TOM I'm not ashamed of my feelings for Pinky. I care for him very deeply.
> TEENA I know. . . .
> TOM Do you suppose I'm really homosexual, Teena, and just can't face it?
> TEENA *(Serenely.)* I've never had reason to think so.
> TOM I have no desire to have sex with Pinky, but I love him. (Daddy? 38)

Pinky gossips and is flustered about things in the same way as Teena's mother. He also carries his knitting everywhere. For all practical purposes, Pinky is Tom's mother.

Although he is far from the most interesting or even the most sympathetic character on the stage, Tom is decidedly the protagonist in Where's Daddy? The problem of the mother-son-heroine of A Loss of Roses is no longer present, and the mother-son dichotomies of Natural Affection are likewise no longer an issue. By disguising Tom's mother as another male, Inge has succeeded in focusing for the first time upon a young, male protagonist. Tom and Teena are married, but

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[Tony Richardson, the director]. . . [are] eager. . . to produce the dirtiest play of the year." (Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram); ". . . the fact proved in Natural Affection is that the sensationally lurid is not Mr. Inge's field. Instead of seeming an integral part of his work, it appears to be clumsily imposed, and, in the process of trying it, his splendid capacity for compassion and human understanding slowly disappear, and a kind of extravagant foolishness and ineptness is substituted" (Richard Watts, New York Post).

[5] Where's Daddy? is dedicated to Michael Wager, the same "Mendy Wager" who was so helpful to Inge in regards to the ending of Natural Affection. The dedication continues: ". . . without whose constant help and encouragement, it could never have been realized" (Daddy?, 5).

Tom has announced he will move out as soon as the child Teena bears is born. He wants none of the responsibility of raising a child and feels Teena and the baby will be better off without him. He is almost an exact embodiment of Donnie's father from Natural Affection. Sue told Donnie:

> SUE He was scared to death of settling down and being a father. . . . He never waited long enough to see what you were like. He just took out, and I never saw him again. . . . Oh, it's a strange kinda sickness in the world today,. . . that seems to make men afraid of tying themselves down to a wife and kids, that makes men wanta run free as goats all their lives. (Affection 28-29)

Tom tries to explain his decision, or at least his fear, by raging at Pinky:

> TOM It's the world that makes you suffer from guilt. Because you've adopted your conscience from the world. . . . and the whole world is full of fear and violence, and hatred, and prejudice, and corruption and hypocrisy, and people are suffering and dying everywhere because of it. (Daddy? 30)

What it boils down to, after all the rhetoric and the clever jibes that could almost be borrowed from television situation comedies, is that Tom believes that "I have to feel prepared for life, Pinky" (Daddy? 30). Pinky accuses him of cowardice, and Tom rages:

> TOM I'm not a coward! Can't you get that through your head? I've fought guys twice my size and come out on top. I've slept all night on park benches in the creepiest parts of this town. I've driven my motorcycle a hundred and twenty miles an hour right. . .
> PINKY *(Breaking in.)* Quiet now. There is a difference between courage and daring.
> TOM *(Bellowing.)* I'm not afraid of anything!
> PINKY I don't mean to impugn your valor. But I think that at this particular time, you might be a little more afraid than you realize. You are about to become a father. That means you can no longer be a boy.
> TOM *(Not fully understanding.)* I know that.
> PINKY It's a terrifying step to take, Tom. Some of us never take it, but just grow up into old boys, and go to our graves without dignity or bearing. Take the step, Tom. I beg you. And take your part in this life as a man.
> TOM *(Still bellowing.)* I don't want a part in this life you talk about!
> PINKY Why not?

TOM Because. It makes me a part of everything I hate. (Daddy? 31)

There is a great deal of this kind of dialogue in the play, of clever set-ups and specific opportunities for soap-box preaching. There is very little action, even less than is usual in an Inge play. And it has a happy ending. Teena gains a backbone after giving birth in their filthy one-room dwelling. She demands that Tom make a specific and lasting commitment when he comes back with the excuse that his analyst has suggested he should at least see the baby:

TEENA No, Tom. Not for a few days. It's got to be for good.
TOM For good?
TEENA Yes.
TOM But Teena. . . that's the rest of my life.
TEENA I know.
TOM I've got to be free, Teena. You know that.
TEENA I'm not trying to persuade you Tom.
TOM Teena, I'm doing the best I can. Don't you see? (Daddy? 65)

And of course Tom stays. Having led a particularly unconventional life before the play begins, Tom's decisions to stay in this confining apartment, relationship and set of mores make him seem even more entrapped than any previous protagonist in Inge's work (if we overlook Spencer in "The Basement"). The real winner is not the male protagonist, but the mother. The young male protagonist who has fought for his freedom has been won over to the responsibility of raising another mother's son. Earlier in the play, Teena identifies herself with the couple who live across the hall:

TEENA I'm a mother, Helen. I think now, that's probably all I ever wanted to be, all the time I was taking piano lessons, and painting lessons, and secretarial courses, and going to acting school. . . all I wanted to be was a mother. (Daddy? 54)

In the final scene, she has her wish. She explains to Tom that the child is now hers. He can do as he wishes.

TEENA I don't want you to see the baby. . . . You told me you never wanted to see him, Tom. . . . You told me you didn't want to know what color eyes and hair he had, or how much he weighed, or anything about him at all. . . . It caused me great pain to have him, Tom. There was one moment, I thought I'd die. . . . I'll always respect that pain. The baby is very precious to me now. I don't want you to

> look at him and run away again. I couldn't bear it. . . . You're perfectly free to go, Tom. You don't even have to send me money. I'll let Mother and Father help me, until I'm able to take care of myself. . . . I'll do whatever I have to, to keep my baby. (Daddy? 66)

Including blackmail his father into staying with them? Teena doesn't add that persuasion, but it seems inherent within the rest of her speech. She is determined that there should be hope for this child even if all of that hope has to come from her. She might well be better off without Tom, but that would not make a happy ending so that the play could be termed as comedy.

In that a child is born into the world and both his parents elect to stay with him and contribute to raising him and to seeing him through the rites of passage of this life, there is hope at the end of Where's Daddy? But there is little honesty. Does Tom decide to stay or is he pressured into it? To have all the forces in his life (his guardian, his friend, his friend's wife, his own wife, his wife's mother and his new-born son) all lined up waiting for his decision produces a great deal of pressure. Whenever Tom has been subjected to pressure before, he has chosen the easiest possible route of escape. Here that escape route is into a tighter trap. He is entrapped by those he loves. Had he been free and returned choosing to remain here before anyone suggested it, there would be some hope for Tom. As it is, he experiences the opposite of Donnie's dilemma in Natural Affection. Donnie is disallowed a family and chooses to express his despair through rage. Tom is shamed into accepting his family and the responsibilities that go with it, and he chooses to accept his fate without a fight. They have each walked into a trap. If there is hope in the fairy-tale ending of situation comedies in which they all live happily ever after, there is hope for this young family.

So often we see Inge involved with the same situations from play to play, sometimes removed by a generation but basically the same situation. In Natural Affection, Sue pursues Bernie in her need for him. Teena is doing the same with regard to Tom in her speech which tends toward overkill, particularly when delivered to a roomful of listeners. Because of her obvious need for him, Tom will return, but for how long? An ending more in keeping with "Glory in the Flower" might have served better here, in which Teena would let Tom go with no implied guilt and would resolve to make her own future.

Many themes can be identified in the works of William Inge and traced throughout his plays. He deals with love and fear and guilt. Certainly he must

have felt these emotions himself. The final three Broadway entries in his lexicon of published and performed plays deal with themes that he has seldom really explored in his work before. The relationship between mother and son is one of these. Another important one is the issue of male homosexuality. Male bonding and good buddies have been featured in his previous work for the Broadway stage, but only in the one-act play "The Basement" has he ever investigated the theme to any considered extent. In these final three plays the subject is first introduced, then presented as a threat, and finally becomes a part of the reality of the protagonist's past.

In A Loss of Roses, Kenny is seen as desirable to an obviously fey minor character. After his introduction to Lila's acting companions, Kenny prepares to leave for his usual Saturday-night activities:

> RONNY *(Following KENNY left)* . . . and if you ever come over to Kanz City, I'll be at the Hotel Wadsworth, down by the Union Station. I should be delighted to. . .
> *(Olga is on the porch now and perceives RONNY's courtship of KENNY. She calls in a voice that rings with authority)*
> OLGA Ronny! (Daddy? 28)

In Natural Affection, Donnie has been physically approached by a guard named Stubby at his reform facility and will be expected to "put out" if he is unsuccessful in finding a home with his mother. Donnie's fellow inmate, Gil, actually offers to pimp for him when they first arrive at Sue's apartment:

> GIL All right then. How 'bout wealthy queers? That's safe enough.
> DONNIE No.
> GIL Why not? They ain't like Stubby. They treat ya better'n your own mother. Give ya all ya want to drink, sometimes take you out to dinner or a show. Then put twenty bucks in your pocket, take-home pay.
> DONNIE Yah, and you take half.
> GIL Well, I'm gonna have expenses.
> DONNIE No! I'm not gonna be no goddam queer.
> GIL You're not bein' a queer. You're just doin' it for the money.
> DONNIE No. (Daddy? 23-24)

In Where's Daddy?, Tom has lived for years with Pinky, a homosexual who openly declares his affection for the boy and whom Tom sees as a haven after he leaves his pregnant wife.

The alternatives which Inge chooses to explore so that the homosexuality does not become the issue shifts the focus of these plays from what the audiences had come to expect from Inge. The vulnerable characters whose "innocent" approach to relationships has enlisted the audiences' sympathies have always, to this point, been perceived as his female characters. Although the corrupted innocents in Inge can arguably always have been male, it is not until the final plays that this becomes obvious. To review quickly: Lola is still the innocent virgin, both to Doc, who feels he seduced her, and to her own image of herself. But it is Doc in Come Back, Little Sheba who surrendered his hope of a career and compromised his ideals through the act of love-making. In order to preserve her as a pure innocent in both their minds, Doc gave up his dreams. He was unable to truly share the relationship and so became a martyr to it and a slave to his only source of release, the bottle. In Picnic, Madge is the most beautiful girl in town, whose society sees her surrender of her virginity as a tragic event; not so much because of the act itself, but because she chose a drifter who cannot earn it by an exchange of life-long security. Again, it is the male "abuser", Hal, who suffers the remorse of their love-making. Madge rages at him but does admit to sharing the desire. Unable to share the consequences of what he defines as his action, Hal runs away once more, accepting his "self-imposed" role as "vile seducer". Inge's ambiguity over the ending becomes more understandable in this light. Inge needed Madge to share some of this responsibility and chose to have her remain behind and martyr herself in her environment as Hal always did by running away. In Inge's chosen ending they will continue to "blame" themselves until there is nothing left of either of them. The wages of sin are the rages of guilt. Logan realized that that rationale, even if it were understood by American audiences in the 1950's, would be perceived as hopelessness.

The innocent of Bus Stop is certainly Bo; but his classical attempted "rape" of Cherie makes her the more vulnerable in our eyes. His mentor, Virgil, has guided Bo to this position of sharing. Bo will not judge Cherie by her past and will be content to build a new life with her away from her environment. Wisely, Virgil realizes that their environment must be free of both their pasts if it is to be successful; consequently, he martyrs himself so they can begin anew. This kind of selfless behavior is echoed in Pinky's treatment of Tom in Where's Daddy? In that play, however, we find the golden couple not on the brink of their newly

shared environment in the clear mountain air of Montana but wallowing in all the natural realities which accompany urban poverty.

In The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs, we see the innocent vulnerability of both Reenie and Sonny and their redemption through the sacrifice of their own Jewish Dionysius in the form of Sammy. Sammy might be described as a catalyst. He makes closer understandings possible: between brother and sister, between mother and children, and, ultimately, between Cora and Rubin. But a catalyst is supposed to influence other elements without any visible change to itself. Sammy pays too high a price to be simply a catalytic agent; again, he becomes one of Inge's martyred sacrifices. To this point in Inge's work, there always needed to be a sacrifice; and, as in the Dionysian rites which accompanied the first theatre, that sacrifice has always been male.

When the sacrifice is male, the dark forces can be vanquished, a ray of hope can shine through for some of the characters. Virgil releases Bo and Cherie; Sammy's death helps Cora and Sonny and Reenie to reassess their own values and to concentrate on reality rather than upon dreams. In the next two plays, however, the sacrifices are female: Lila's suicide attempt puts an end to her sojourn at this stop on life's side-street and sends her to her end through sleazy alleys behind strip joints; Donnie sacrifices a woman and adopts a deadly calm as he joins his dark side in the night. There is no character freed by the sacrifice of either of these women.

In Where's Daddy?, Inge sacrifices another male. Tom's desperate desire to remain free and unencumbered is sacrificed to the better good of the tiny family. Who is saved by his sacrifice? The child has a father as long as Tom can bring himself to stay. There are so many boys in Inge whose fathers could not bring themselves to stay that we wonder if the sacrifice is genuine. The problem is that the purpose is not clear in this play. Is Inge suggesting the kind of relationship he ridiculed in "A Social Event"? Is this marriage to be another based upon business-like arrangements and negotiated deals? In that play, the purpose was a gentle satire of a monied class. The same situation does not apply here. In "A Social Event" the plot was manipulated to accommodate the comic tone, and no sacrifice was necessary. Here, Tom gives up his freedom, he surrenders to responsibility, but we see no immediate, obvious gain as we do in either Bus Stop or The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs. Has the sacrifice, by the time it is used in Where's Daddy? become as pointless as other rituals? Has its purpose been obscured by too many other issues which cannot be resolved by

this symbolic gesture? Has the strength gone out of even Inge's most powerful symbol until it seems as hollow as Tom's promise to stay?

The actual exploration of that sacrifice began to emerge with the last three plays. We can only speculate as to how much of his own struggle is mirrored in the camouflage Inge uses in these plays. Kenny is never tempted by another male after the initial meeting with Lila's co-workers, but the play certainly introduces the traumas that accompany homosexual tendencies: the Oedipal feelings, the issue of incest, the dichotomies between pure love (usually centred in the mother figure) and the simple carnal sowing of wild oats.[6] There is no male sacrifice here unless it is in Kenny's launching himself forth on another journey toward escape, the same kind of journey Hal was on in Picnic. The victim of his self-discovery is Lila's innocent trust. Never again will she trust any man, and gone forever is any hope that she might reclaim her roses.

In Natural Affection, Donnie has a pure but corrupt buddy in Gil and knows that the homosexual advances of the guard await him if he cannot secure a place in his mother's home, heart and life. He tries everything to fit in; he compromises his behavior to present the image of a good son; he endures the behavior of Vince, whose desire for Bernie is only thinly disguised. In the the end he almost allows himself to be seduced by Claire, who stands between these extremes: between Bernie who appears to have everything Donnie wants and needs -- overt masculinity, security and Donnie's mother-- and Vince, who represents everything he will have to become if he returns to the reform school: a victim of sham, self-disgust and fear. Donnie brutally kills another woman who also emerges from Vince's place in search of Bernie. It is a way out. Because no one could be expected to read that interpretation into the play on first viewing, it served to shock, to disgust and to alienate theatre-goers. It also marked the first time a woman was offered up as a sacrifice in a major Inge play. Of course it offended the blue-haired club-women who were so accustomed to using an Inge play for their Wednesday- afternoon trip to the Broadway shrines. Like the Bacchae before them, they had always been subconsciously aware of the sacrificial element, and although they never knew whether that sacrifice would be physical, mental or emotional; whether it would be young or old; or rich or poor; there was an unspoken guarantee that it would be male.

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[6] Just one text which discusses these "traumas" in relation to homosexuality is: Human Sexuality, Rosemary Hogan (New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1980), 113-125.

Inge had never reacted well to criticism, and now he received the cruelest reviews of his career. He was stranded in an impossible position: between a need to further explore themes that were very important to him both as a man and as a playwright, and another desperate need to re-establish the only success he had ever really known. He felt that success could only be regained by pleasing the critics and thereby the theatre-goers of Broadway. Could he have explored the other New York theatre which was beginning to speak to audiences Broadway could not reach? Could he have investigated the flesh-pots of Hollywood? Could he have become an ex-patriot and scampered off to Paris and Rome? He certainly tried some of those routes, but in the end he needed to regain his footing where his first solid stance had been taken-- on main-stream Broadway. His final Broadway script is a tribute both to the art of compromise and to the ultimate futility of that exercise.

Where's Daddy? is neither fish nor fowl and certainly lacks the stronger meat that the themes require. It is a subtle comedic quiche that never quite succeeds in realizing either of its goals. It neither sheds valuable light on the plight of the individual who mistrusts his own feelings nor entertains the audience. It had an impossible task. Protecting the safety of either of these goals meant an obvious betrayal of the other; the resulting compromises and half-truths are simply not believable. Tom is the protagonist. Finally the young male questing fearfully for his existence through the labyrinth of modern society and social entrapment was the focus of an Inge exercise. But his playwright has robbed him of any tool he would need to fight the system. Inge has a desperate need to please the system and cannot provide Tom with any weapon that would give him a fighting chance. For example, Inge has provided no guidance and no guide. The best friend character (or guide, if we remember Virgil in Bus Stop) is divided into two parts, a technique which Inge has successfully used before (again in Bus Stop). In Where's Daddy? however, the split is between Razz, a fellow-actor and next door neighbor, and Pinky, the former guardian. Each offers advice, but neither of them challenge Tom to really deal with his problems. In Bus Stop, the split between Virgil and Dr. Lyman gave Inge an opportunity to personify two sides of an argument, and to explore two parts of his own philosophy. Here, Razz is black and happily married, Pinky is gay and comically serene. What was it that made these two similar for Inge? One possible interpretation is that sex is accepted as taboo with both friends (Razz) and mothers (Pinky). Rather than a tough little hustler who pedalled his body to great success a few years ago and

has trouble adjusting to the less affluent life-style of the struggling actor with a wife to support, Tom is treated as a loud, but ultimately nice, young man who was saved from the street and the orphanage by a kindly, effeminate gentleman named Pinky who never once laid a pinkie on him while he was giving him an education, fixing his teeth and providing the parental affection of which the youngster had hitherto been deprived. Likewise, there is no tough edge to any part of the play. The toughest it ever gets is in the final pages when Teena, the new mother, refuses to let Tom see the child unless he is willing to make a full-time commitment to them as his family. And, of course, Tom agrees to stay, and the curtain falls on a "happy" ending. Tom joins the very establishment his playwright has been representing through characters that contrast to his protagonists in earlier plays like Picnic and The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs. Tom and Teena become Rosemary and Howard in New York, ten years later and twenty years younger. Inge allows his protagonist to conform and encourages him to delight in it. Inge allows his work to echo his own choices -- to survive at all costs until you can no longer live with the compromises.

A glance at the titles of his final one-act plays reveals a good deal about the directions he chose to explore in those final unperformed and, in several cases, still unpublished works: "The Call", "Midwestern Manic", "A Murder", "The Killing", "Margaret's Bed" and the final one-act, the title of which hovered between "The Disposal" and "Don't Go Gentle".[7]

Throughout the sections above we have seen a playwright exploring variations on a general theme of love. In the three successful full-length plays we see some hope for the major characters, some hope that they or some of them will be able to re-route a journey which seems to be on a collision course. Often this re-routing will take the form of a sharing with another character, and often these sharings smack heavily of compromise and require the reader to suspend cynicism if not logic. However, if we are willing to suspend our judgment, to accept that people can change, there is an escape for those characters. They need not continue in a cycle which will lead only to more of the same.

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[7] Because the scope of this thesis is only those works which were available to the public through publication or presentation in New York before the final failure, Where's Daddy?, these one-acts are not part of our consideration here. As has been stated earlier, these would serve admirably as a separate thesis topic as would Inge's screenplays, both those from other writer's original work (like All Fall Down by Jame Leo Herlihy) or his own works: Splendor in the Grass, Kitten with a Whip and Good-luck, Miss Wykoff (a.k.a. The Sin).

In Come Back, Little Sheba, Doc and Lola recover from the violence that erupted and are seen in the final scene sharing some plans for the future. Doc is ready to conform to the habits necessary for alcoholics, and Lola has made the best of herself and her home, physical evidence of her willingness to abandon all expectation of ever again seeing either her little dog or her dreams of the past. In Picnic, Hal has made it out of town, and Madge is following him (if we choose the Broadway ending). There is hope that together they can make a future, just as Rosemary and Howard plan to do. In Bus Stop, Cherie and Bo are on their way to a future they both want. He has convinced her that all he wants is who she is right now. Elma is left untouched by the seamy proposition of Dr. Lyman but a little wiser in preparation for her own journey which will come in her future. The possibility of hope exists in these plays.

To a large extent, this is also true for the characters in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs. Cora realizes she is too involved with her children and relaxes the mores that prevent her enjoyment of the physical side of marriage. Reenie and Sonny become less afraid of life through their brush with death. Because these realizations are tied to the suicide of an intriguing minor character, we find it harder to focus on the positive outcomes Inge suggests. The element of violence can be ignored or glossed over (as in Sheba), the probability of failure repeating itself can be overlooked in the face of at least one wedding (in Picnic), and the abandonment of an intriguing minor character can be interpreted as ". . . what happens to some people" (Four Plays 219) when others move on to happiness. The element of violent death, however, seems too vivid a sacrifice when used simply to prevent the entrapment of the Flood family in Stairs.

And it is entrapment with which Inge is involved. He presents souls made captive by their own fears, by society's expectations and by their relationships with others within that society. Doc is entrapped by alcohol, and both he and Lola are trapped in a marriage that offers little of what they initially dreamed. Hal is caught on a treadmill of escape from his own inadequacies, both real and imagined, and Madge is a prisoner of the small-town mentality that insists upon marriage in return for sex. Cherie is a helpless foil of her own ambitions for a career in show business, and Bo is hooked by the first pretty face he sees. Cora is a frigid wife who was caught in a whirlwind romance and now lives only to better the lot of her own children. Reenie is caught in the snare of trying to please everyone at once, and Sonny lives in a fantasy world of movie-star

pictures, waiting for the ultimate romance of the cinema to rescue him from a normal life.

As he moved into the final three Broadway productions, Inge's theme of entrapment began to dominate that of the exploration of love, and the possibilities for hope or for change became less convincing. Whether or not his own life experience influenced that or not is another matter. It is that change of focus which affected both his writing and the public's reactions to his ideas.

In A Loss Of Roses, the major hope we may expect is a dim one: Kenny may escape the dichotomy he defines as affection and live a new life. But at what cost? Each of the characters is trapped in a variation of their own fears throughout the play: Lila's future is pitched into the hopelessness of pornography; Helen is left alone with her trips to redemption from tent-show evangelists; and, given Inge's strongly drawn drifter characters (like Hal in Picnic), our hopes for Kenny are none too promising either. Natural Affection reinforces this idea of a return to the same cycle of entrapment or to a more drastic version of it. Sue will be even more under the control of Bernie after chasing him and begging him to return. Donnie has finally found a calm -- through violence. We can see no hope at all for these characters; they have exchanged one prison for another, more severe. And the price of this hopeless exchange was the life of a human being, bludgeoned to death before our eyes.

Where's Daddy? offers no hope either. Or rather, it attempts to offer so much hope that after exploring such complex situations we have trouble accepting that such an ending could be possible outside a fairy tale. What has really changed? A child has been born. And its mother, Teena, has made a choice; surely, a logical choice for any mother, she has chosen her child. Tom has allowed someone else to influence his decision once again. This time the only person who refused to dominate him throughout the play has been placed in the position of forcing him to make a choice. No one has moved from the trap they were in at the beginning of the play. The only change is that there is now even more responsibility. To accept that this will encourage Tom to change his ideas, reform his ideals and reject his entire generation's philosophy requires a quantum leap that goes beyond hope.

What proof can there be of these explanations and opinions? I contend that Inge has provided a visual metaphor for this entrapment theme in the very sets he describes for his productions. The opportunities for escape, for the triumph of hope, are mirrored in the settings themselves. Likewise, the

hopelessness of certain of his plots can be seen as soon as the curtain rises on the settings he describes himself.

CHAPTER VI SETTING

William Inge set out to explore "love" in its various forms in the bulk of his work but increasingly used it as a means of entrapment. This major theme can actually be seen as a visual metaphor in many of the set designs he outlines at the beginning of each play. There appears to be a physical (or at least a symbolic) "escape hatch" in each of Inge's works, whether one-act or full length, which offers an alternative of hope to at least one of the characters. This "escape-hatch" takes the form of an actual route of escape which a character could traverse between the world of the play and the outside (offstage) world. An excellent example occurs in Picnic:

> SCENE: *The action of the play is laid on the porches and in the yards of two small houses that sit close beside each other in a small Kansas town. The house at the right belongs to Mrs. Flora Owens. . . . The audience sees only a section of the house, from the doorstep and the front door extending to the back door, a porch lining all of the house that we see.*
>
> *The house at the left is inhabited by Mrs. Helen Potts. . . . Just the back of her house is visible, with steps leading up to the back door. Down farther is a woodshed, attached to the house by the roof. The space between woodshed and house forms a narrow passageway leading to the rest of Mrs. Potts' property. The yard between the houses is used interchangeably by members of both houses for visiting and relaxation.*
>
> *. . . Behind the houses is a stretch of picket fence with a gateway leading from the sidewalk into the yard between the houses. Beyond the fence, in the distance, is the panorama of a typical small Midwestern town, including a grain elevator, a railway station, a great silo and a church steeple, all blessed from above by a high sky of innocent blue.* (Four Plays 75)

Hal has appeared from this wide-open space before the play begins, and most of the characters who wish to escape find themselves staring out at it sometime during the play's action. When Hal and Madge leave (separately) at the end of the play, they leave between the houses and into the distance toward the train. This play, in this incarnation, is full of escape hatches. The characters have only to pass the houses by and parallel the picket fence to escape the stage, or to pass behind either of the houses on either side or between them to reach a vista which stretches far into the distance. Anyone can leave this play as easily as he leaves a picnic. The confining set is like two giant, aging picnic blankets laid side

by side so that neighboring families can share easily across them. But they will always be free to scamper as far afield as they choose, dependent only upon their own memories for how closely they stay to the picnic blankets themselves.

Each of Inge's plays features this kind of plan. His settings are very simple for the most part and often reminiscent of the traditional box set of an age before he began to write. But within their simple set suggestions lies a paradigm for his themes and a visual foreshadowing of how much "hope" there is for the escape of these characters from the entrapment they have constructed from their individual definition of love. Beginning, as we did earlier, with the one-acts, let us trace this metaphorical use of setting in each of Inge's major works.

A. THE ONE-ACT PLAYS

"The Mall"

> *The scene is the mall of an amusement park in a seaside resort town. The promenade stretches across the stage, benches at the back, the sea presumably being the audience. . . .Behind the mall, in the distance, one can see the vast, deserted structure of the Playland. A Ferris wheel, a roller coaster, a parachute ride loom up in the background, great and useless structures waiting for their season to return. Closer behind the promenade are the banners heralding the freaks, likenesses of whom are pictured on the banners in fading primary colors, in almost grotesque caricature.* (Short Plays 110)

Much like Picnic (which preceded it), "The Mall" provides entrances at both sides of the stage. The escape route then parallels the eternal sea, which Inge is careful to remind us is the audience itself. Unlike Picnic, where a seemingly limitless number of specific exits display themselves should the characters choose to take them, there are only two in this play. They are on a continuum. You can go forward or backward; if you move downstage you fall into that great sea of anonymity, and if you try to move upstage you encounter "the deserted structure of the Playland" and must pass under fading views of yourself and those you have met before on this two-lane highway. People move on this thoroughfare without strong direction. This is a stopover point between legs of a journey. Some return to it having tried to move farther in one direction or another (like Barney and Clara); others pass here frequently, a respite on the treadmill of their own existences (The Matrons); still others make it their home, fully aware of

the futility of movement on a two-way street that never encounters an avenue. These are the Crones, who can remember love from here, and the young lovers, who are wise enough to seek their fulfillment in relative stillness; they know what will happen in the morning when they too must move on along this route parallel to the sea--he, in one direction, she, in the other.

"The Rainy Afternoon"

> *The scene is the interior of an old barn in a small Midwestern town. Outside it is raining a slow, constant drizzle.. . . At left is a crude stairway leading up to a loft that is totally darkened.* (Short Plays 99)

The Dark at the Top of yet another Stair. In the full-length play, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, the young boy is afraid of that dark spot at the top of the staircase before it opens out into the hallway that provides access to the family bedrooms. Here, other memories will begin at the dark place atop these stairs to the loft. When Vic arrives we are not told any more about this set: "Vic Bates, a boy of Wilma's age, pulls up at the door on his bicycle" (Short Plays 100). The escape route here, such as it is, is at least visible to us at all times, through the open door of the barn. Billie Mae uses it to race out into the rain, her tears aflow. We are not told if the door is upstage or down, to stage left or right; what is important is that it is there and it is used. Two characters are trapped in the ominous dark at the top of the stairs, but one, the youngest, the most innocent, the purest, does manage to escape. There is hope despite the ringing menace of that final stage direction:

> *(The stage is empty now. There are several moments of absolute and mysterious silence).* (Short Plays 106)

"The Strains of Triumph"

> *The scene is laid at the side of a small hillock behind which lies an open field. In the far background are bright colored pennants flying in the breeze, and we hear the distant sound of strident band music, proclaiming victory. Mixed with the music is the sound of cheering voices. . . .* (Short Plays 132)

The hillock must be of considerable size, because the Old Man and Ben can stand on it, the old man actually climbs it at the beginning of the play, and it is obviously large enough to disguise Ben when he overhears the lovers who are downstage kissing while he is behind the hillock. The banners and trumpets in the distance are as much a part of the set as the hillock. They are firmly unattainable from this vantage point. They are to be appreciated from the commanding view at the top of the hillock. If a character is to participate in their revelry he must exit around the hill and travel a distance offstage to run his race. The Old Man never appears to leave the hill. It is his duty here to call others to him, to lure them by good common sense and other Ancient Languages to a position of "watcher" rather than "participant". There is almost a sense of the fallen warrior being guided to the hilltop to look down upon the human drama as it unfolds beneath him. Nothing tangibly ominous happens here, at least nothing so ominous as the final stanza of Dickinson which inspired the play:

> As he, defeated, dying
> On whose forbidden ear
> The distant strains of triumph
> Break, agonized and clear.
> (Quoted from Dickinson in Short Plays 131.)

The hope here is for those who can leave the hillock, find their way around it and descend to the victories of life in the distance. Tom accomplishes this and takes Ann with him to run their race together through as much of life as they will share. The other two athletes who came to bring Ben back to run his race also leave and travel in this way to the events of the afternoon, or of their lifetimes. Those who climb the obvious height are doomed to an existence as frustrating as Tantalus, bound just out of reach of the fruits of their own existence. In this play it would seem that this is the natural fitness of things--if one is, like the Old Man, confined to Ancient Languages. There seems little hope, however, in watching someone Ben's age encouraged to make that decision so early.

"A Social Event"

> *The scene is the bedroom in the home of a young Hollywood couple, Randy Brooks and Carole Mason. . . . There is abundant luxury in the room but a minimum of taste.* (Short Plays 30)

It may seem futile to explore a theme as broad as "entrapment" through a play as limited in its scope as "A Social Event". This is, however, the first of Inge's plays considered in this paper which does not present an escape hatch. There is no view into the distance suggested by the playwright; the only exit, besides the bathroom, is the bedroom door, and that leads only into the other rooms of this luxurious but tasteless home. By "home" does Inge imply a house or an apartment? Are we stories above the street or stuck on a hillock in Beverly Hills? The only actual contact with the world is through yet another device, the telephone. True, one character, Muriel, the cook, seems to have contact with the outside world, but the only time she and the couple will actually be together in that outside world will be at a funeral. This is a dead-end set. There is no escape from the constant pandering and one-upmanship that keep Randy and Carole alive. This is not where they live, this is where they plot, and the entire set is a kind of coffin, with only one door which leads nowhere.

"Bus Riley's Back In Town"

> *The scene of the play is the Fiesta Room of the Hotel Boomerang in a small town in middle Texas. The Fiesta Room is only the bar of the hotel, and as a bar not a very satisfactory one, being permitted to sell only beer. But the decor pretends, at least, to an air of festivity, with symbols of primitive Mexican culture. Mexican hats and serapes hang on the wall, there is a big poster of a bullfight, and the doors to the toilets are marked, one Senora, the other Senor.* (Short Plays 79)

Inge gives us no clue as to whether or not the outside can be seen from this room. It is a room in a hotel, it has three visible doors, two for the facilities and one to the lobby. We learn this when the salesman leaves, ". . . *wandering through the archway leading into the hotel lobby*" (Short Plays 79). Inge does not suggest that we can see where people go when they leave. Ralph and Bernice drive home to relieve the baby-sitter, Jackie enters twice, Bus doesn't leave after his initial entrance until he takes Jackie with him. There is no strong feeling of any hope when one leaves this place. The bartender is a fixture who never leaves, the Salesman stays here at the hotel and simply moves from one room to another after he arrives from his sales for the day. Truly, people boomerang in this hotel; they seem to return to the same place no matter how far they have

been thrown on each toss of life. We have little hope for Jackie and Bus. There will be a night of lust, perhaps, but neither of them will really realize what they want. The Fiesta Room is another dead end, just as the behaviors of its clients lead to the same place, again and again.

"People In The Wind"

> *The scene of the play is the corner restaurant of a small country town in Kansas. The restaurant serves also as a ticket agency and rest stop for the bus lines operating in the area. . . . It is a dingy establishment with few modern improvements, illuminated by two naked lights hanging from the ceiling on dangling cords. . . . Outside there is a strong prairie wind that sounds angry with intent to destroy. It comes and goes, creating a great blast against the windows and seeming to shake the very foundation of the frail building, and then subsiding, leaving a period of uncertain quiet.* (Short Plays 16)

The third line begins with the stage direction: *"(Going to the entrance to look out the plate-glass window)"* (Short Plays 16).

Clearly there is at least a view of a way out. In the later incarnation of this play, Bus Stop, Inge will modify the interior but leave the same idea of a large window through which the elements can be seen. The street upon which the bus will travel lies outside this window. The bus will stop, and it will continue on. People who wish to leave this place do have a choice, if they have the price of a ticket. If they do not travel on the bus, they have the choice of staying here or braving the elements and looking for other similar shelter. In a sense, as he implies by his title, everyone here is being blown by the wind itself, at the whim of the elements, and not all the elements are controlled by mother nature. Some of them are controlled from within us, and some of those rage as wildly and as uncontrollably as the very Kansas wind in mid-winter.

"Glory in the Flower"

> *The play is set inside a small roadhouse called the Paradise, close to a Midwestern town. It is a totally unpretentious sort of place, yet there has been a serious attempt, in the decor, to create, successfully or not, an atmosphere of gayety. A kewpie doll, wearing a Hawaiian grass skirt, stands on the shelf behind the bar, and the walls have been painted with amateur murals depicting*

> *some fantasized seashore, edged by swaying palm trees, topped by a crescent moon and a starry sky. . . . The bar is extreme R., and the entrance extreme L. One can see the gaudy neon sign outside, PARADISE. At the back are an enormous jukebox and a row of about six booths for customers.* (Cerf 168)

Very reminiscent of "People in the Wind", this set again offers a view of the outside through a window. This time we can see the name of where we have stopped. No longer the Boomerang, this is Paradise. This is where you will find people like the salesman harking back to better days, and teenagers looking for a place to avoid the everyday world that begins at the door when they leave. In the little space at the back they can dance and dream and even on a good night seek another kind of paradise through the inglorious weed. This is not a paradise, only the semblance of what we settle for as paradise on earth. The fact that we can see the outside in this version of the play (whereas "Bus Riley's Back in Town" was totally stage-bound) allows a glimmer of hope for someone. Jackie, in this play, actually manages to escape the fate of her younger counterpart in the previous version. She leaves, insulted in both plays, only to return in "Bus Riley" and agree to Bus' proposition. Here she returns, offers her friendship, assures him there will be no hard feelings and leaves clean. In fact she even manages to deliver some sound advice to a younger traveller on the very doorstep of Paradise. On that spot she advises Joker to truly "grow up. . . in the way you think and feel. . ." (Cerf 189), and she surrenders the roses in her hair on that altar between earth and Paradise and leaves Bus to his own deserts. Here there is a view of an escape route, and we see one of the characters actually take it, leave this Paradise for teenagers and other dreamers who are not yet quite ready for what passes for the "real" world, and enter a world where there is more hope that she can accomplish a future based on who she is now, not upon who she always dreamed of becoming.

"An Incident At The Standish Arms"

> *The scene is the rather pretentiously stylish living room of a luxurious apartment in a large American city.* (Short Plays 125)

There are clearly two doors: one leads to a bedroom, the other provides an exit to the hallway. The characters speak of coming "up", implying that this room is high above the street. There is no exit. One door leads to what The Woman clearly

sees as the scene of a crime, the other is the passage from one hell to another. There is no visible route of escape, and Inge promises us none. This Woman is trapped as much by her own desires, of which she is clearly ashamed, as by the confines of the apartment in the sky. The cab driver carries his own escape with him. He does not live here, but he has been invited here for a tryst, and his hurried departure, so desperately sought by the Woman, demeans him. He does not belong here; he must return to the street. What seemed to him a possible escape for a few minutes has turned into a kind of trap that will sour the stolen moment. He can return to the streets; she can only visit them. She is confined here by her own guilt, by the mores of her class, and by the need to instill those standards into the next generation. The escape route of the hall and the elevator is invisible to those who live here; this is their gilded cage.

"Memory of Summer"

> *The time is late September, and the scene is the beach of a now-desolate resort. The sea presumably is at the left of the stage, and a wall, about shoulder-high, lines the back. Powerful waves crack against the shore. At the right are a few shops or stands that were full of noisy activity all summer, but now are boarded up, and an occasional wind goes whistling through their emptiness. . . Viola comes through a gate in the wall at the back.* (Short Plays 69)

This setting is very reminiscent of the set for "The Mall", although the sea and the parallel line which exist in that play have been modified here. There is a gate which permits access between the two areas, the approach and the beach. The sea is Stage Left and therefore does not make as pronounced a statement as it was to do later in "The Mall". This time the sea is a danger to one of the characters, not a simple resting place for the spectators. Viola goes swimming and causes great alarm to Alice and to the handsome young Coast Guard who manages to summon her back, not with his whistle of authority, but by the sound of his own voice. If she has been planning an escape through the waves, it is not going to be today. The wall that separates the offstage world from the beach of the setting can be eliminated in two ways; one can use the gate as the women do or can jump over it as the young man does upon his entrance. When he leaves, he runs off; they again make use of the gate. Because of his youth he seems to have free reign over the area; in fact, because he is the caretaker of this stretch

of beach, it is his job to look after it. The women are more earthbound; they return relatively easily to the homes that await them: Alice to her own place and Viola to the doctor who will arrive to take her away from the eternal days of summer she anticipates despite the steadily cooling temperatures. Viola is less entrapped by the physical set than she is by her own attitudes and expectations which deviate from reality in two ways: first , she is entrapped by the illusions of freedom and youth prompted by the sea and its attendant activities; and second, she is entrapped by her own reality through the nature of her illness.

"The Boy In The Basement"

> *The setting is an old Victorian house of fussy dignity, kept in the most excellent tidiness and repair. It is in a small mining town close to Pittsburgh. Outside the house, pinned into the ground is a small, neatly painted sign, "Rest in peace with Scranton Mortuary" . . . . the house (is) a funeral parlour as well as a home. Most of the action of the play takes place in the kitchen of the house-- a big, clean, white room, with a table in the center. . . . At the right end of the room is a stairway leading to the second floor. At the back of the room, a doorway leading to the outside and the garage. At the left of the room, a big bay window and a door leading to the steps into the basement. A small, dark room at the left indicates the basement.* (Short Plays 39)

The Dark at the Bottom of the Stairs. There is an eerie sense of displacement having the whole house shown as described in realistic reproduction except for the centre of the business which is supposed to be on another floor but which is actually simply in shadow at the edge of the "real" world. Perhaps this is simply in anticipation of the limited resources of the theatre organizations which may produce it, but it makes a strong statement about the position of death in this house, if not in all of our lives. On the same side of the stage as the big bay window that opens onto the reflections of a life outside this place is the small, dark place that serves as a final resting place of our whole bodies. After our visit to this room we are no longer complete in any way; the embalming process is designed to finally rob us of those organs and fluids which made our lives flow in the shell of the body; and after our visit here we simply appear presentable for our final appearance on the stage of life. The three worlds are presented in strong relief, almost like sections of Plato's famous cave, daring us to choose the reality from the imaginary. Surely it cannot be by chance that the major piece of

furniture in the cheery kitchen is a large slab-like table which is very similar to ". . . *a long white slab, something like a kitchen sideboard, that drains into a big sink.* . . " (Short Plays 52) which dominates the "basement" area. Inge even suggests parallel action to underline this double-image when he has Spencer assisting his ancient father down the stairs from the second floor as the two men are carrying Joker's dead body into the "basement room".

And what of escape? There are exits to the other floors: one plainly leads to death, the other to the bedrooms where nothing of life ever occurs anymore. The bay window looks out onto a world that passes by, and there is a door to the garage where a vehicle can carry you to another destination. Spencer has taken this escape route often to escape the confines of this existence. In our view, he has been seen to take it only once, at the end of Act One when he decides to leave here for ever and seek a new life elsewhere where he can be himself. But he returns and ends in the basement room ministering to the only thing he really loved in the world upstairs. The similarity between the basement function and the family home have become even clearer by the end of the play.

"The Tiny Closet"

> *The scene is a boarding-rooming house somewhere in a Midwestern city. On stage we see the big living room of the house, which is Victorian in design, with ornate woodwork and high ceiling. . . . An ornate wooden stairway is at the right, and the outside entrance is down right.* (Short Plays 58)

The set is very ordinary. The dark at the top of these stairs is designed to be kept well hidden. The juxtaposition of the real tiny closet which is upstairs and, therefore, offstage, and the small closet which serves to hide Mr. Newbold in the living room makes the play almost surreal. We are not intended to spy on the real thing, but we are given almost the same sensation in the centre of the most public room of a private house. The moment when Mr. Newbold tries on the hat which has always provided him with an escape and realizes that the magic of that moment is closed to him forever because others have discovered his secret is even more poignant when we realize that in his desperation he has tried the transformation outside of all his tiny closets: the locked one upstairs, his own living quarters upstairs, and his own imagination.

In this play, we assume that the front door opens onto the street outside, but we are not told that we can see that street at all. This is an enclosed world. The world of a tiny closet.

"To Bobolink, For Her Spirit"

> *Everyday the weather permits, a group of autograph hunters assembles outside the 21 Club in New York.* (Short Plays 5)

The next page of introduction to this, Inge's first one-act play, is full of character descriptions but offers little or no information about the setting. Later in the play, through stage directions we learn that there is a doorway visible: *"A young couple appears in the doorway coming out of the restaurant"* (Short Plays 7-8); there are opportunities for vehicles on the stage: *". . . she and her escort disappear in a cab"* (Short Plays 8); there is an actual curb on the set: *"The couple stand at the curb now. . . "* (Short Plays 11); and that there is a grill fence around the Club: *"She stays back, leaning against the grill fence surrounding the club. . . "* (Short Plays 11). Here, Inge is more interested in the characters than in their setting. A playwright who is usually scrupulous about the kind of problems his setting will cause the production team actually calls for raised sidewalks and taxicabs in his first one-act. Despite these expensive suggestions, the setting of the play has the same aura of the movie-set which surrounds the dialogue. Famous names are bandied about and create the kind of aura of excitement that such names usually do, or at least did in the early 1950's. This setting is straight out of any film about Hollywood nightlife, with the autograph hounds hovering for the slightest glimpse of their favorite celebrities. Inge explores entrapment in class attitudes. The movie stars are confined to the club and the curb. The doorman is there to ensure that there is as little blurring of the classes as possible. The fans are confined as much by their own sense of class as they are by the wire mesh fence and the eagle-eyed doorman. They seek to be near enough to observe those at the entrance and far enough away to avoid confrontation with anyone who is not a celebrity. In the purest sense, then, the characters provide the setting, and their dialogue and movement dress it within our imaginations as well as in their own.

Before moving into a consideration of the settings of the major plays, it is necessary to remind ourselves what this thesis is attempting to explore.

Obviously no playwright can write settings that stray beyond the limits of the conventional stage and then use the conventional stage to realize his ideas. Many plays have been written for the box set, for the traditional stage of curtains and flats. Surely all such plays cannot be accused of setting out to "entrap" their characters simply because there is only one exit, or because the window curtains are kept closed to avoid the expense of recreating a view through an open window. Why, then, should this be a consideration in the case of William Inge? It is not so much that Inge set out to entrap his characters in the setting as that they themselves turned the setting into a no-exit situation. Perhaps it is more in the way the characters use the setting than in the setting itself that this phenomenon manifests itself.

In "The Boy in the Basement", for example, the grocery boy, Joker, comes and goes in this house; Mrs. Scranton travels from meeting to home often. It is the character's choice with regard to just how this place is used that supports the theme of entrapment. Spencer has kept his secret hidden here in this place and travelled to a neighboring city to give vent to his homosexual tendencies. He will no longer do so. His father has ceased to move in the community because of age and physical problems. They are now entrapped in an environment which offers shelter and safety and nothing beyond the social comforts. They will die here. They are experiencing a mental , social and emotional embalming before the physical act can legally be performed upon them. Whether they or their circumstances have caused this does not matter. It has happened, and they are now entrapped. Inge has simply used his setting to underline that fact for us. It is possible, therefore, to examine that aspect of his process, how he sets up the possibility for that kind of underlining to take place.

There is an escape hatch in "The Boy in the Basement". It exists in the door to the garage. If one were in love, one could escape with the loved one to the bedrooms upstairs, or spread a picnic blanket on the lawn near the Mortuary sign and sunbathe with the loved one in full view of passers-by. Once these escapes have been labelled by the inhabitants in the way the whole house is labelled as the business it represents, then those other possibilities no longer exist. While the escapes exist, members of the audience can follow the play in hopes of some kind of alternative solution. We may think that this looks pretty unhealthy and hope perhaps that a breath of fresh air might blow back in from upstairs or from the outside and blast open the windows so that real images will appear in these lives again, not just the odd car approaching seen through the

plate glass of the bay-window. There is no hope for Mr. Scranton Sr., and Mrs. Scranton, though still ambulatory, seems too set in her ways. But Joker comes and goes with joy and warmth and genuine affection for Spencer; and Spencer himself does get away on certain weekends to some sort of other life that keeps it possible for him to exist here without becoming as staid as his parents. After the secret is out, however, this can remain a haven only if certain compromises are taken. Mrs. Scranton outlines those. Spencer chooses to leave. He has escaped. But something draws him back: responsibility, guilt, fear of living alone, anxiety at accepting a new life-style, an inability to live without the confines of a secret existence, or some combination of all of these; it really doesn't matter. He returns, and the rules are changed: they will all be pleasant to each other. The embalming process begins in earnest. They will wear smiles that are painted on for the convenience of others. They will remain in the niche that has been allotted to them where everyone knows they can be found. It is more important that the pleasantries be observed than that the real feelings be explored. Now, by his return, Spencer has accepted that, and the escape routes are closed to his own personality. He will exist now as the middle-aged efficient mortician caring for his aging parents. He will be held up as an example to all young men who are too wild and self-centred. His mother will be proud of him. She will experience no more guilt about his weekends away from home, or her imagined part in their necessity.

The only hope remaining at that point is in the grocery boy, Joker. But that hope is dashed almost immediately. As Spencer carries his father downstairs, his golden boy is being delivered to the embalming room in the basement. As Spencer sets his father's dying body in the chair in front of the window where the old man can gaze out all day at nothing, the boy's body is being laid out on the same side of the stage, waiting for Spencer to come and relieve him of his life fluids in preparation for his final trip into the grave. At that moment all three of the males in the play are in a line: the father in his chair, out of the way for another day of staring into the blank future; Joker, oblivious to everything in this life; and Spencer, caught between them. If it were a film, Spencer would move to the top of the stairs to descend into the basement and discover Joker. On Inge's stage with the basement room depicted beside the bay window, he is caught suspended in a very dark area at the top of an invisible staircase that leads to his own version of what these two on either side represent to those who watch. It is a no-exit situation. The escape hatch that could work for Spencer in this play at

this moment is as invisible as the staircase. It has not even been created by the playwright.

Certainly the "escape hatch device" of this thesis is not always so obvious. Granted, it may not have been part of Inge's thought process for certain of the plays ("A Social Event" and "To Bobolink, For Her Spirit" are good examples). The point is that it is a very strong metaphor in certain of the plays and is a matter for consideration particularly when we move into the longer plays. It is one thing if the device is there to be used, and the characters can make choices about whether or not to use it; and quite another when it is obviously not there from the very beginning, a circumstance which becomes more obvious in the later plays in particular.

B. THE SUCCESSES

Come Back Little Sheba

> SCENE: . . . *the downstairs of an old house in one of those semi-respectable neighborhoods in a Midwestern city. The stage is divided into two rooms, the living room at right and the kitchen at left, with a stairway and a door between. At the foot of the stairway is a small table with a telephone on it. . . . The house is extremely cluttered and even dirty. The living room somehow manages to convey the atmosphere of the twenties, decorated with cheap pretense at niceness and respectability. The general effect is one of fussy awkwardness. . . . In such areas the houses are so close together, they hide each other from the sunlight. What sun could come through the window, at right, is dimmed by the smoky glass curtains. In the kitchen there is a table, center. On it are piled dirty dishes from supper the night before. Woodwork in the kitchen is dark and grimy. No industry whatsoever has been spent in making it one of those white, cheerful rooms that we commonly think kitchens should be.* (Four Plays 5)

The "escape-hatch" isn't even mentioned in the first set description. Not until page sixteen (in the published edition) after Marie and Turk have left Lola alone in the house for the day, do we read:

> . . . *They speed out the door and LOLA stands, sadly watching them depart. Then a sad, vacant look comes over her face. Her arms drop in a gesture of futility. Slowly she walks out on the front porch and calls:*

LOLA Little Sheba! Come, Little She-ba. Come back. . . come back. Little Sheba! (Four Plays 16)

Lola goes out onto the porch and calls for the return of her lost. . . dog? youth? life? love? The first time we hear the title of the play is from this front porch. Her hope for the return of the lost dog is centred on this porch, from which she makes her daily pleas for its return. The tradesmen who visit in the morning divide between the front and the back door; the postman who bears news of the outside world approaches from the front , crossing the porch if Lola isn't already standing on it waiting for his appearance. The milkman, who bears products needed to keep the body going, has full reign over the kitchen, and comes in through the back door. The major light of the play is on the porch, the heavy shadows of the other houses making the living room dark. The kitchen is the darkest of all. Doc and Lola sleep upstairs; we cannot see their room, only the staircase that leads to it. Their roomer, Marie, sleeps in a bedroom which has been converted from their dining room. It is next to the living room and not described beyond the existence of its door.

The kitchen is Lola's domain; the living room is where Doc spends most of his time. The middle ground in this setting, as in most suburban houses, is the dining room, which here has been converted into a bedroom for a boarder (Marie in this case). Instead of a meeting place for both the residents in the marriage, this dining room houses the personification of their dream of youth. As that personification, Marie is given full reign within this setting. She has kitchen privileges, entertains her guests in the living room, and actually enjoys sex with Turk in her bedroom (their dining room). The single moment when all their interpretations come together occurs in Act Two, scene one, when Doc realizes for the first time that Marie is not as pure as he envisions her.

LOLA . . . Do you think you could get home a little early? I want you to help me entertain Bruce. Marie said he'd be here about five-thirty. I'm going to have a lovely dinner: stuffed pork chops, twice-baked potatoes, and asparagus, and for dessert a big chocolate cake and maybe ice cream.
DOC Sounds fine.
LOLA So you get home and help me.
DOC O. K.
Doc leaves kitchen and goes into living room. Again on the chair is MARIE's scarf. He picks it up as before and fondles it. Then there is the sound of TURK'S laughter, soft and barely audible. It sounds

> *like the laugh of a sated Bacchus. DOC'S body stiffens. It is a sickening fact he must face and it has been revealed to him in its ugliest light. The lyrical grace, the spiritual ideal of Ave Maria is shattered. He has been fighting the truth, maybe suspecting all along that he was deceiving himself. Now he looks as though he might vomit. All his blind confusion is inside him . . .* (Four Plays 44)

Doc lurches out onto the porch for a breath of air. He then becomes aware that Lola has been waiting for him to leave before giving the "all clear" signal to Turk. It is at this moment that Doc becomes aware that it has happened before, and that Lola is part of this intrigue to sully Marie's purity.

As has been suggested, the "escape-hatch" in this play is the porch where Doc finds Lola and Marie after colliding with Turk on his exit. The porch primarily represents a refuge, a place for calm and air. It is here that Lola retreats to call for her loss. This occurs only twice in the script, both times in Act One: first in the morning (scene one), then again in the evening (scene two). When Lola has dinners to plan for Marie and her fiance, when she is distraught about Doc's violence and subsequent detention, she doesn't use the porch. It is a place for her to seek some refuge from an existence for which she is ill-prepared. In Act One, scene two, Lola and Doc use the porch to discuss the reason for their marriage, the child that was on the way, and the abortion that ended its life. It is the first time that the subject has been discussed between them, brought out into the open, into the clean air of the open porch. Very soon, however, Doc retreats into the house, into his living room, and the marriage resumes its cloistered attitude.

There are a number of interpretations for the use of the porch as there are for the title of the play. These are places and thoughts to which Lola resorts when she does not know what else to do, when her regrets over the departure of those things she depended upon are too strong to suppress. She is still a little girl inside, still the little girl who Doc feels tricked him into marriage. She lives to a degree in fantasy and therefore pays little attention to the reality of gaining weight, dirty dishes, and a husband caught in the abuses of his own fantasies.

Doc is perhaps more seriously in need of the porch, although he uses it less often. Upon his return from the "hospital", he climbs the front steps and crosses the porch to enter the house. He has sought his past and his contentment in liquor, has chosen to suppress his discontent until it explodes

within him. On the surface he is neat and well-groomed, but he bottles his rage and discontent inside. He has no porch. He has the crutch of hard liquor.

Picnic

The setting described in the opening of this play has already been discussed at the beginning of this section. Picnic, of course, is the most familiar of the titles which Inge gave this play. When he first offered it to Josh Logan to direct, it was called Front Porch, (Logan 276), an intriguing title in view of the part played by a front porch in his previous play. It is also interesting to contrast it with the setting Inge describes for Summer Brave, the final "published" version of the play. The subtle changes in the play's focus are foreshadowed in the changes in the suggested set design:

> *The action of the play takes place on the front porch and lawn of a small frame house in a small Kansas town. The house itself is a humble dwelling built with no other pretension than to provide shelter for its occupants, but its occupants are women who have worked hard to keep up an appearance; so the house although it may need a coat of paint, is kept tidy, and there are colorful slip covers on the porch furniture and lush flower beds at the edge of the porch. Surrounding the house are clusters of heavy foliage from the trees and a stretch of green lawn that levels back, fading into the horizon. It is a homey scene marred only by a sign, hand-painted, tacked to one of the thin little columns on the porch: ROOMERS.*
> *In the background can be seen the back entrance to the house of a neighbor, MRS. POTTS, who inhabits a cozy cottage. Beyond that is the panorama of a typical, small Midwestern town, with a church steeple, a grain elevator, a great silo in the center of a cattle ranch, and a few municipal buildings rising out of the sloping terrain.*
> *When the curtain goes up it is early morning and the stage is empty. It is late summer, Labor Day and autumn has just begun to edge the green landscape with a rim of brown. The scene has the color of luscious fruit just beginning to ripen. Dew is still on the countryside, and mist rises from the earth in the distance. Far off, the whistle of a train coming to town is heard. It is a happy, promising sound.* (Summer Brave 3)

A number of changes particularly designed to focus the work have been suggested here. One of the houses is much more dominant; in fact, the home of Mrs. Potts is now referred to as a "cottage", and it is far upstage. These were certainly not the first changes this setting went through. Logan recalls that he

"...insisted he try to rewrite, putting all the action in a single set--the backyards of two adjacent houses--instead of his original sprawling six sets" (Logan 277). Because of the change of emphasis between the houses, the road in front of the larger edifice becomes more important. It is now a thoroughfare along which passes the parade of life. The focus is now on this continuum, and most entrances and exits are made along this road, making Hal's escape between the houses even more of an alien action than it was before. Interestingly it also makes less of Madge's final exit. In this play she simply retraces the steps she has taken to town and her employment every day of her life. There is now a road to travel, a standard to meet. Hal does in this version what he has always done; he runs away through society's back yards to a train in the distance; and so does Madge: she follows the same route she always does, in the same outfit with the same purpose, to simply go on with life.

Bus Stop

SCENE: *The entire play is set inside a street-corner restaurant in a small Kansas town about thirty miles west of Kansas City. The restaurant serves also as an occasional rest stop for the bus lines in the area. It is a dingy establishment with few modern improvements: scenic calendars and pretty-girl posters decorate the soiled walls, and illumination comes from two badly shaded light bulbs that hang on dangling cords from the ceiling; in the center are several quartet tables with chairs, for dining; at far left is the counter with six stools before it, running the depth of the setting; behind the counter are the usual restaurant equipment and paraphernalia (coffee percolator, dishes, glasses, electric refrigerator, etc.), on top of the counter are several large plates of doughnuts, sweet rolls, etc., under glass covers. At the far right, close to the outside entrance door, are a magazine stand and a rack of shelves piled with paper-back novels and books. At back center is an old-fashioned Franklin stove. At the back right is a great window that provides a view of the local scenery. Against the wall, beneath the window, are two long benches meant for waiting passengers. At the back left is the rear door, close to the upper end of the counter. Above this door is a dim hand-painted sign, "Rest Rooms in the Rear."*

It is 1:00 A. M. on a night in early March and a near blizzard is raging outside. Through the windows we can see the sweeping wind and flying snow. Inside, by comparison, the scene is warm and cozy, the Franklin stove radiating all the heat of which it is capable. Two young women, in uniforms that have lost their

starched freshness, are employed behind the counter. (Four Plays 153)

Clearly this play derives from "People in the Wind", discussed earlier. The details are more complete here and the atmosphere more inviting, but the basic shape of the play, as the basic shape of the setting, are present in the one-act.

Perhaps this play, more than any of his others, is the best example of Inge's use of the metaphor of the continuum, the cycle of life and love. Each stop we make on the continuum becomes a tangible memory, each memory is personified in the title, Bus Stop. Although we cannot see the road itself, we can see the vehicle which travels upon it, and that vehicle is tall enough with a destination sign large enough that we can see from a reasonable distance exactly what is in store for us. The bus itself is a vehicle for taking a journey. Buses stop here from both directions; therefore, it is possible to go backward as well as forward or to stand still in this one place, as in all places along the continuum. The road outside is the escape route, and in this play as well as in several others it goes both ways. The bus enters from one side of the stage and exits at the other. There is, therefore, a possibility of escape. The road goes both ways, the buses only go one. But if the bus outside at any given moment is not going in your direction, just wait a while and another bus will be along. There is an element of hope inherent in that simple confidence.

Within the setting itself there are traps of a sort, or at least divisions that are commonly accepted by most travellers as indications of conduct. The counter is long and dominant and serves to separate the hired help (the permanent residents) from the itinerant guests. Regular visitors (Carl, the bus driver) often cross that barrier without any complaint from the staff (Carl also frequents Grace's private rooms above the restaurant); but single-time visitors are not encouraged to do so. There are subtle class dividers as well: bar stools and booths appeal to different types of travellers, invite different types of intercourse and determine the amount of service expected.

An interesting blur of purposes occurs when Cherie needs to change into a costume in order to perform for the assembly. The semi-privacy of her accustomed dressing rooms is doubled admirably by simply crouching behind the counter to make the change.

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs

> SCENE: *The setting for the entire play is the home of Rubin Flood and his wife and two children, in a small Oklahoma town close to Oklahoma City. The time is the early 1920's, during an oil boom in the area. The house is comfortable and commodious, with probably eight or nine rooms. It is one of those square, frame houses built earlier in the century, that stand secure as blocks, symbols of respectability and material comfort.*
> *All we see of the Floods' house is the living room, where the action of the play takes place. There is a flight of stairs at the far left. At the top of them is the upstairs hallway, which is not accessible to windows and sunlight. During the daytime scenes, this small area is in semidarkness, and at night it is black. When the hallway is lighted, we can see the feet of the characters who happen to be there. We are conscious of this area throughout the play, as though it holds some possible threat to the characters.*
> *On the far right, downstairs, is the outside entrance, with a small hallway one must go through before coming into the living room.*
> *In the middle of the living room is a wicker table and two comfortable wicker chairs, placed one on each side. Upstage center are sliding doors leading into the parlor, where we see a player piano. To the left of these doors and under the stairway, is a swinging door leading into the dining room. Extreme downstage left is a fireplace and a large comfortable leather chair. This area is considered Rubin's. . . . Through a large window at the back, we see part of the front porch to the house, and can see characters coming and going.*
> *As for the atmosphere of the room, despite the moodiness of shadowy corners and Victorian (more or less) furnishings, there is an implied comfort and hospitality.*
> *When the curtain goes up, it is a late Monday afternoon in the early spring, about five o'clock. Outside, the sun is setting, but the room is still filled with soft, warm light.* (Four Plays 225)

There are areas here for all the normal family functions, but all we see is the living room and the entrances to other areas. The play will then deal with those parts of family life which are open to discussion in public areas. It is probably possible to escape to the dining room, and the kitchen (we assume) beyond, and the back door beyond that; but we must imagine much of that. Likewise there will be no private peeks into the bedrooms upstairs. Like the characters, we will be warned away by the darkness which separates this open public area from that upper private story. People can be seen approaching and departing if they use the front door. The front door is the polite entrance to any home, and if that is all we see, surely there can be no entrance here other than a polite one. Rubin's

back-door affair with Mavis Pruit will never surface here, and Sonny's detractors confine themselves to the street beyond. All the private areas are only suggested; they are only doors which open and close with no glimpse of what lurks behind them in the back-stage darkness. They are constant reminders of the fear connected with the bedrooms upstairs. They are protected by the Dark. Only the character's feet can be seen in that area when it is lighted, and no part of them can be seen at all when there is no light. The fears we might encounter there cannot even be identified.

Clearly, any escape must be made through the front door, out onto another of Inge's porches and down a street that is not visible. The sense of entrapment is very strong here. Probably stronger than in any play of Inge's thus far discounting the one-act "The Boy In The Basement", which provides much of the same atmosphere of foreboding in a very similar setting. Each of the areas off the main halls, both upstairs and down, (in both plays) can be seen as private little boxes into which individuals may vanish. There is no real light emanating from any of them, and they are dark burrows for hibernation, not escape routes. The set itself is a living example of Inge's use of the forces of dark and light. The dark is always there lurking at the top of the stairs and in the heavy shadows cast throughout the setting. The light only comes from outside, and then only intermittently, either when the sunlight peeps into the darkness of this home or when a visitor like Sammy appears.

The huge old house is designed as a visual metaphor for the problems that plague this family. It is a barn of a place, and, in that, is reminiscent of the barn suggested in "The Rainy Afternoon". The problems explored herein are similar to the problems explored in that play as well. They are the problems of children and of memories of happier days. The neuroses that plague Rubin and Cora and Lottie and Reenie and Sonny are all manifestations of those fears we experience most strongly in childhood. Some of them have become dreams that haunt; and some others, dreams that will never come to pass. Still others remain in our memories forever, as dark as nightmares. Even at the end of the play when Cora climbs the stairs to join Rubin in their bedroom, the dark is still prominent at the top of the staircase. She moves through it as if combatting a fear, but not fully understanding or conquering it.

Just as the "dark" is more obvious in this play (to the extent that it is even enshrined in the title) than it was in his original play "Farther Off From Heaven" (which shared the same basic setting without the emphasis on lighting or the lack

of it), so was the dark side of love to be more emphasized in the plays which were to follow, those last three troubled Broadway efforts which were to ring down the curtain on his career.

C. THE LATER PLAYS

A Loss of Roses

> *A mother and her son sit at a table in the kitchen of their modest little bungalow, eating their supper. The time is 1933, in late summer. The mother is Mrs. Helen Baird, a woman in her middle forties. . . The son, Kenneth -- or Kenny--is a young man, or boy, of twenty-one.*
> *The house itself, small and poor, still retains a little of the dignity that Helen shows in her face, and there are a few pieces of furniture in the various rooms that bring a little style and richness from an earlier day. The house suggests that the people in it once saw better times.*
> *Next door to the Bairds' little bungalow is a vacant lot where, during the summer, a variety of attractions appear. At present a roller-skating rink has moved in to attract the summer trade. A little later in the scene, the music from the rink will be heard, a kind of calliope playing monotonous, swinging waltzes.* (Roses 1)

The vacant lot is developed into a number of things in this play: a skating rink, an empty lot and a tented home for prayer meetings, but it remains steadfastly secondary to the confines of the cottage. The play could be opened up to show some of these offstage scenes, but Inge has chosen for them to remain subjects for conversation as the tensions rise in these cramped quarters where a desirable young woman will sleep in close proximity to her best friend's young son. These empty lot sets are so secondary that Inge does not actually describe the evangelist's tent, although we hear the man's speech in the background and we know it is there because of the stage direction:

> HELEN I'm going to get ready for the revival.
> *(In the background now, we hear the organ music, a soft hymn being played; people pass the house in pairs on their way to the tent, the women all carrying palm leaf fans, the men looking uncomfortably serious.) . . .*
> (Loss 82)

The escape route here is another of Inge's famous roads which passes before the house where the action takes place. This one seems to have a

difference. The street which passes in front of the house is visible because Kenny can be seen returning home from work, and Lila on the porch can call out to him as he approaches. However, this is not a major thoroughfare, it must be a kind of side street, since the vehicle which delivers Lila is only heard offstage. The road before the house would meet with this larger thoroughfare offstage. It is significant that Inge has chosen to place the setting of this play so obviously on a side-street, because this underlines the fact that we cannot actually see the route that must be taken to escape. Kenny and Helen seem to live, then, on a side-street, and their lives are consequently conducted not in the light of the main drag but in a lane. Their lives are not part of a mainstream. Lila arrives and leaves by car much as Cherie arrived and departed the Bus Stop in Inge's earlier play. For her this time with Helen will be a simple bus stop on her life journey. But buses do not pass here. To Kenny, Lila seems to come from a brightly lit mainstreet lined by the theatres in which she has worked. She will stop momentarily to rest here on this quiet side-street before moving on, back to the bright lights and the bustle of the real world. Lila hopes to find peace and love and fulfillment here in the quieter atmosphere, but her plans will not reach fruition. She will leave this dim side street for the deeper darkness of alley ways, where the tawdry entertainment will cost her much more than her dreams and talent. The only people who stop on this street are itinerants in search of entertainment in the case of the skating rink or salvation in the case of the evangelist's tent. Neither is it made clear whether the empty lot is between the house and the corner or is farther down the block from the corner. Inge does not seem too concerned about the specifics of his setting in this play, which is interesting in itself, since his previous notations have been very thorough.

Natural Affection

> *The time of the play is the approximate present, before dawn on a raw December morning. The place is Chicago, a small but comfortably furnished apartment on the near North Side. It is comprised of a large living room that includes space for dining, a bedroom, a bath and a kitchen. The entrance to the apartment is on the far left, where we can see a small portion of the hallway outside leading to the elevator and the door to the apartment across the hall, into which we have no view. The apartment we are concerned with belongs to an attractive business woman named Sue, who lives in it with her lover, Bernie Slovenk.*
> *When the lights finally come up, we see that the apartment has been furnished and decorated with moderate cost and considerable*

pretension. At the present time, there is a decorated Christmas tree in the living room. (Affection 9)

This play marks the first of Inge's sets which we know is above ground, with one exception, "An Incident At The Standish Arms". Sue's trapped existence is very reminiscent of The Woman in that play. Both are trapped by their need for physical sex and by their affection for their home. This apartment, like that one, presents no visible "escape hatch". We cannot see any elevator or even very much of the hallway. Certainly that hallway can be seen as the link to freedom, there will be an elevator and a stairway, and then there will be a ground floor and a large exit to the streets of the city. But none of this is visible. All we can see is the door across the hall which opens into another trap much like this one, in which the inhabitants choose to play cruel games on each other and upon their neighbors. There is no physical way out when the haven of that apartment has turned into another kind of cage. A young man in flight from internment has become entrapped far above the streets of a hostile city, in the emotional darkness where even the stairs are invisible. His reactions are violent, but there is clearly no escape other than through an emotional outburst. At least not in the world he has been presented by his playwright.

Where's Daddy?

The setting of the play is a small, cold-water flat somewhere in a small tenement in midtown Manhatten. Included in the setting is a portion of a dark hallway outside the living area, with entrances to two or three similar flats. The home we are looking at is a drab one. It looks used without being lived in, as though the tenants might abandon it at a moment's notice. The kitchen, the living room, the bedroom, the bath are all a part of each other in this necessarily cozy place. The bathtub is kept covered by a wooden top when not in use. The kitchen sink serves also as a bathroom sink. Only the toilet is separated from the rest of the flat by a door.
The only furnishings on stage are those which necessity has forced the young couple living here to bring into use. There is a table which serves the functions of all tables in a house, although the covered bathtub sometimes is depended upon, too. There is a bed which happens now to be made up. A folded screen leans against one wall. Sometimes it is used to conceal the bed for privacy. There is a small couch, grimy and dilapidated. There is only one chair, a big overstuffed model, the upholstery on which is torn in places, exposing the wadded stuffing. There are numerous packing cases, still unopened, that line one wall of the flat. Some of these have been brought into use as stools or coffee tables. There are paperback books and magazines everywhere. A disturbing piece of

> *abstract sculpture created out of old automobile parts and tin cans sits on one of the big packing cases as proudly as if on a marble pedestal. And several examples of Pop Art hang on the walls, mostly enlarged cartoons that look like blow-ups of comic strips.* (Daddy? 7)

Another highrise, this time in a less desirable neighborhood. As Inge's plays descend into a kind of chaos with little honest character development and even less hope, the settings move farther downtown and rise higher into the sky, farther from the street where some kind of firm footing might be possible.

There must be a hallway of sorts, because Tom exits to knock on the door of the apartment across the hall. There is a staircase up to this floor because Mrs. Bigelow and Pinky complain about the climb. Inge himself never mentions the stairs or how the hallway might be illuminated. We are curious because that is the only possibility for an escape-hatch, and the play itself makes little reference to how it is to be shown. Here very little is private. The only door is on the bathroom, there are no curtains on the windows, the screen is used to separate the act of birth from the prying eyes of the audience. What we see is what they are. There is no escape; Tom and Teena live in one of the bedrooms in the Dark at the top of the stairs, and there is no visible escape. When you leave this setting you disappear into nothing unless Inge chooses to have you materialize at the end of the upstage hallway later on. Ben Edwards' set design for the original Broadway production shows a series of comic book plates around the proscenium. The stage itself becomes one of those large explosive plates that interrupt the uniformity of the rest of the page.

There is a metaphor in evidence in Inge's settings. Whether or not it was conscious on his part is open to speculation, but it is clearly evident when we look for it. Inge had a healthy respect for the drive that kept things moving forward, for the industry that produced progress. In that respect we can see the road of life in most of his plays. The route upon which his characters will travel is usually part of the setting: completely obvious and visible in plays like "Memory of Summer", "The Mall" and Picnic; strongly suggested in others like "To Bobolink, For Her Spirit", "The Boy in the Basement", "Glory in the Flower" and Bus Stop; and invisible in those plays in which little forward motion is possible, like "A Social Event", Natural Affection and Where's Daddy? Inge is also intrigued by those places where travellers commonly stop for any length of time, either to take a

breather or to set up a homestead. Those wayside stopping places may be right on the route (as are the bus stops in "People in the Wind" and Bus Stop), they may be in full view of the passing show as front porches are designed to be (as in Come Back, Little Sheba and Picnic) or they may lie farther and farther off the beaten path (whether in a barn as in "The Rainy Afternoon", on a hillside as in "The Strains of Triumph", or actually on a side-street as in A Loss of Roses).

If Inge's continuum of love runs parallel to the road of life which figures prominently in his settings, then a strong case can be made for the power of love in our lives, at least as Inge sees it. Inge seems to believe that a chance mishap in the matter of love can serve to throw us off the main track of life itself. We can battle to get back (as Barney does in "The Mall") or resign ourselves either to staying in one spot (as Grace does in Bus Stop) or to a bogus journey that never ends, a fate which could be attributed to both Virgil and Dr. Lyman in the same play. Neither does Inge seem willing to settle for a "marriage in name only". His frustrated wives (Mrs. Scranton in "The Boy in the Basement" and The Matrons in "The Mall") are certainly proof that love cannot be divorced from sex. But the line between sex and lust seems difficult for him to define, particularly with respect to his more "innocent" characters whose journeys along the highway of life are only beginning. Again and again we are warned by Inge of the vulnerability of the young. Accepting his metaphor of hope being within sight of life's highway, how sad it is to see Donnie and Tom, in the final Broadway plays, trapped high above the streets of impersonal cities.

We are constantly being warned in Inge's plays about the dangers which lurk in the upper stories. The loft in "The Rainy Afternoon", and the lurking dark at the top of many staircases (The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, "The Boy in the Basement", "The Tiny Closet", Come Back, Little Sheba), and the danger in living high above the street which is a feature of plays like "An Incident at the Standish Arms" , Natural Affection and Where's Daddy? all caution us to beware of heights. Things happen to people at those altitudes. The fact that the last two plays feature less than hopeful scenarios and are, at the same time, designed to be played in that area of danger for Inge may be indicative of something beyond the decision to place those plays in larger cities where that type of accommodation was most common.

Elia Kazan says very little about Inge or about their collaborations in his best-selling autobiography. The one story he does relate, however, offers a chilling anecdote in this regard.

> In New York, I began to see him. . . . I noticed that his apartment in New York was on the second floor, just one floor above the concrete backyard of the apartment building, and had no other view. One day I asked why he didn't change it for another apartment, one with an attractive view, high above the dirt and noise. We were good friends by then, and he told me that it was because where he was now, no matter how depressed he became, he would not ever be tempted to suicide. Years later I'd remember that conversation.[1]

That is one of the few conversations that Kazan chooses to relate about Inge. Likewise, many of Inge's collaborators have chosen to share very little about their recollections of working with him. In the following chapter consideration will be given to some of those public recollections of a very private man as they relate to what happened to William Inge.

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1 Elia Kazan, A Life. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.) 573-74.

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION

William Inge was the first to acknowledge that he learned a great deal from those with whom he collaborated. On more than one occasion he has left record of his thanks:

> The success of these four plays, I must share in each case with my director. This is not just a pleasant compliment. I have come to learn how important good direction is to a play and to realize that good directors are as scarce as good playwrights. I was most fortunate in finding Daniel Mann, unknown at the time, to do Sheba. He sensed all the play's implied values and projected them superbly. Joshua Logan, with Picnic was my second director. We had our ups and downs with that play, which I attribute mainly to my second-play nervousness and indecision. An unstable author, who isn't sure what he wants, is a great liability to a director; so if Picnic did not come off entirely to please me (as rumor had it), it was my own fault. Josh only sensed my indecision and tried to compensate for it. Still, I feel Picnic was a good show. Josh gave it lovely picturesqueness (he is perhaps the most visual of all directors) and feeling of size. I worked on the play with him for a year and a half, during which time he gave of himself very spontaneously. I can never cease being grateful for all that I learned from him.
>
> Harold Clurman is the only real intellectual I know in the theatre. He seems to me a man who has channeled very powerful emotions into a vitally rational life. I was a little dubious about taking Bus Stop to him. I didn't see how he, the most metropolitan man I know, could bring understanding to the play's rural types. But he understood them perfectly, I felt, as though by contrast with himself. And he gave me a beautifully felt production.
>
> Working with Elia Kazan sometimes borders on the supernatural, he intuitively senses so quickly all the dim feelings about a play that lie in an author's subconscious. During production, he is the gentlest, humblest man I've ever known. He talks with actors like a ministering angel, infusing them with courage and insight. His range of understanding is from the most delicately sensitive to the most cataclysmically violent. He is a great creative talent. (Four Plays ix-x)

Not all of those who worked with him have been as generous. Many of them have chosen not to mention him at all in their various writings about the theatre and their specific careers.

There is also the matter of those writers who influence us the most without ever working at our side. In Inge's case there is a strong homage paid to Tennessee Williams. Inge began to write soon after an interview which he

conducted with Williams during the first run of Williams' first play, The Glass Menagerie. In "Farther Off From Heaven", Inge's heroine is very reminiscent of Laura from that play. Laura has a club foot, and that makes her shyness even more painful. In "Farther Off..." Inge's young heroine has a broken front tooth which makes her afraid to smile or speak when others are around. There are strong overtones of Williams, too, in plays like "Memory of Summer", in which Inge's Viola is constantly seeking the company of younger people and is being taken to "another doctor" when she returns to the city. The final scenes of A Streetcar Named Desire show Blanche Dubois in similar circumstances.

Inge clearly felt indebted to his actors as well, and he had some excellent people in his plays. Shirley Booth garnered excellent reviews for her Lola in Come Back, Little Sheba and went on to win an Academy Award for her portrayal in the film version. Joshua Logan remembers phenomenal luck in locating the cast of Picnic:

> I saw Madge as the girl on the Art Nouveau candy box--romantic, moody, sensuous and yet fundamentally innocent, even gullible. Bill Inge had said finding the right actress would be no easy task. But I knew there was a man who could solve any girl problem. I called Dick Rodgers. "Dick, I've got girl trouble again," and I explained the kind of girl we needed.
>
> There was a pause that I recognized as Dick stepping into his private thinking chamber.
>
> "Janice Rule. I'll send her over this afternoon." And sure enough, that afternoon "Madge" walked in.
>
> . . . For Millie, Madge's teen-age, tomboy sister, who was bright but yearned for love, an unknown actress in her twenties begged to be allowed to read for me in costume, sure that I would think her too mature if I just interviewed her.
>
> I was intrigued. A young boy-girl appeared onstage in blue jeans, a man's shirt with its tails hanging out and a little Confederate corporal's cap. Her face was scrubbed shiny, and she spoke with a slight impediment as if she were wearing braces. She electrified us all. There was our Millie, with all her various emotional and comic shadings. And that was the beginning on the New York Stage of one of our greatest actresses, Kim Stanley. (Logan 281)

Inge himself was quick to pay tribute to the actors in his plays:

> I also feel very indebted to the superb actors who have taken part in my plays. . . . I am deeply grateful for the many talented people who have given of their own freshness and vitality to the

parts I have written. If there have been poor performances in my plays, I don't recall them now. (Four Plays x)

Joshua Logan claims to have a better memory:

None of us, though, was really clear about the character of Alan, Madge's suitor and Hal's college chum. So we closed our eyes and cast the part as though we were pinning the tail on the donkey. At least he was old enough to be Hal's senior class friend and tall enough to go out with Madge.

. . . After a week of rehearsal it was clear that the actor who played Alan was wrong.

. . . For the bit part, Joker, a young filling station attendant who made a one-line pass at Madge, there applied a handsome young man who had left the Yale Drama School and was selling encyclopedias to support his wife and three children. He got the part of Joker and he also became Hal's understudy. His name was Paul Newman.

. . . Since Paul Newman was so good in his bit, I asked Bill if we couldn't reverse the ages of Hal and Alan, making Alan a freshman who hero-worshipped an upperclass Hal at college.

Bill liked Newman so much that he rewrote the part quite quickly, and we made the switch. (Logan 282)

Logan seems to have had quite phenomenal luck with understudies:

The understudy we chose for Madge and Millie was talented enough to play either one of them. Her name was Joanne Woodward. (Logan, 283)[1]

Harold Clurman remembers Inge:

At our first meeting, I recognized William Inge's hypersensitivity. He was more withdrawn than any dramatist I had ever met, and excessively modest about his work. At our first discussion of Bus Stop, he asked if I wanted any revisions in the script. After the first out-of-town performances, I insisted that he substitute something for the joke that ended the second act, since it had nothing to do with the plot or theme, and he complied.

Inge was not afflicted with the acute vanity I had found in so many other writers. But on opening night in Philadelphia, when a TV commentator who had just reviewed Bus Stop in less than lukewarm fashion, came into the very restaurant where we had just heard his review, Inge averted his face like a whipped child before an unkind father. On another occasion, he lashed out at a waitress in a delicatessen who insisted on putting his hat on a hanger after he had placed it on a chair beside him. 'I want it there,' he shouted.

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[1] At this point in his memoir, Logan goes on to describe the collaboration over the ending to Picnic cited earlier in this paper.

> His emotion was far in excess of the waitress's 'crime'. Inge was a gentle man, but at that moment I could see there was much in him that was repressed.
>
> He had been an alcoholic, and through psychoanalysis he had overcome this. He rarely mentioned analysis and the help it had been to him, but its influence was everywhere in his plays. For him, analysis had been a light in the dark. Bill could not reconcile himself to his homosexuality, and I often heard him say that homosexuality was a form of arrested adolescence, an evasion of responsibility.
>
> . . . Highbrow critics denigrated all of Inge's plays. They seemed to resent their success. Though Inge was certainly not a major talent, I believe he has been underestimated. His later plays, beginning with A Loss of Roses and Natural Affection, were too violent and unhappy for wide audience acceptance, and they all failed.
>
> . . . With the exception of one light comedy, Where's Daddy?, a failure I directed in New York, Inge's last plays were fierce. They dealt with the havoc resulting from the suppression of instinctual drives, and our alienation from a society becoming ever more bewildering and cruel.
>
> I was in Europe in June, 1973, when Inge killed himself. I was deeply sorry. He was a lonely man, ill at ease everywhere. For him, life must have been a constant ache. Only work and acceptance of that work could have saved him. By "acceptance" I do not mean box-office success or even critical acclaim, but simply the opportunity to be heard, to be vouchsafed a platform. (Clurman 228-230)

Any major references to Inge and his collaborations ends here. Little is ever said of him by others.

There are a great many aspects of Inge and his writings which have been left as matters of speculation. Hopefully this thesis has identified the need for a more thorough investigation of the forces which resulted in the kind of decline he experienced both as a man and as a writer. A number of interviews need to be conducted while those who could cast some light on these matters are still alive. The very silence which they have chosen to espouse needs to be examined if we are ever to fully understand whatever became of the promise that Inge's work seemed to represent early in his Broadway career.

It is clear from the references made by his colleagues that Inge was a playwright who had little self-confidence and that he needed to feel that he was successful on levels he could not always control. He needed to please the critics and the audiences as much as he needed to please himself. He sought to

explore the themes which had always intrigued him but felt the pressures of finding solutions that would be acceptable: to his audience, so that they would continue to attend his productions; to his critics, so that they would continue to encourage those audiences to attend; to his collaborators, so that they would be enthusiastic in their exploration of the theatre process; and to his associates, whose encouragement he needed in order to formulate his own conclusions about those themes. Perhaps it is little wonder that his themes became distorted.

But surely these pressures exist for all playwrights. Why should Inge's case be any different? Inge states that:

> I try to find all that I can in the human lives that I know and are available to me -- and to find the meanings in those lives secondarily. I'll always have to work that way rather than to take a theme and work in the characters secondarily. [2]

Part of the attraction of Inge's characters (and of his subsequent strength) is that they exist as real people and that they do not seem to conform to a pre-arranged formula. Many of his one-acts appear to be thumb-nail sketches for a character rather than more traditional one-act plays in which there is a more conventional beginning, middle and end to the plot outline. Even in his earlier plays Come Back, Little Sheba and Picnic, the links between the characters and the themes is not so strong as those to which we've become accustomed with other playwrights. The calm and decidedly hopeful conclusion of Sheba did not ring true even in 1951 and, given the increased awareness of the inherent problems of alcoholism and family abuse, can have an even more ominous ring in our own time. Such tenuous links can make it difficult for audiences (or readers) to accept the traditional or expected ending.

One of Inge's major confrontations with a collaborator arose over the ending of Picnic, in which the character of Madge and her final walk was differently interpreted. Inge, true to his own dictum, seems always to have sought the true conclusion for the character, and was obviously aware that that conclusion might not always result in a traditional ending or even in one which was "acceptable" to those whose opinion would ultimately determine the success of the production. The problem of either exploring what he believed to be true, or securing an acceptable conclusion, came to a head with Picnic. Inge allowed himself to be persuaded to Josh Logan's ending and received all manner of

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[2] Interview in the New York Times, 20 February 1953, 14.

awards (including the Pulitzer Prize) as a result. Clearly he was not convinced even then, because he insisted on publishing another version (under the title, Summer Brave) with his own original ending. The problem continued in his next play, Bus Stop, in which he allowed a traditional happy ending by sending his young lovers off together at the conclusion. However, he left the most positive of his own spokespeople (Virgil) behind as a kind of sacrifice to this happiness he had permitted. Again, the results were very positive, even if the critical acclaim and audience attendance were the only criteria.

At that point we see the major division between his successes and his failures. At that point he began to compromise between his need to explore his own struggle, always expressed through his characters, and the ultimate success of the enterprise mirrored through the final resolution of the plot. After Bus Stop, these two became increasingly more difficult to rationalize, and the plays became less and less successful: in their presentation of believable, identifiable characters, in their plot resolutions, in the clarity of their theme(s), or in their success in the newspapers and at the box-office.

Early in his writings, Inge presented the theme of a continuum of love within the cycle of life. Although there always seemed to be a kind of required atonement for love that occurred outside of society's accepted mores, there also seemed to be a limit to the extent to which an individual would be expected to atone. There is hope that Doc and Lola will find a peace through their lives together at the end of Sheba. They have paid with their dreams (his, of the return of the innocent love which Lola represented to him originally; hers, of the return of her little white dog), and they can now go on into a day-to-day reality and share the incidents of that existence. In Picnic, Hal and Madge continue to wrestle with their own problems with physical attraction. Whichever of the endings we accept, the characters are still separate, still searching. Whether or not they find each other now, they are each aware of two sides to their feelings. Hal found something brighter than physical release with Madge, and Madge became aware of the darker side of her own desires. They must now, each of them, look for some way of rationalizing the two sides of their natures in the future. The exploration of these dichotomies could lead to hope in either version of the play. These characters could find an honest peace through a re-examination of their motives. In each of these first two Broadway plays there is also an example of a relationship which, on the surface at least, seems to mirror the sham of what society will accept. In Sheba, Marie has slept unashamedly with Turk but runs off

to marry Bruce, who is the better provider. All three are quite content with that situation; they each got what they wanted, and none of them suffer any pangs of conscience or guilt for their actions. In Picnic Rosemary and Howard keep company for months, have intercourse at the summer picnic, and get married. Rosemary has to beg him to marry her, but she registers no regrets in her final scene, and Howard rationalizes that people are more content to buy from a married merchant than a single one. These characters personify society's behavior and serve as parallel contrasts to Inge's main couple in each play. Are there two accepted ways to look at society and its mores? One, to suffer guilt if we stray from the accepted path; the other, to simply ignore the mores and please ourselves? Which is the proper path? How can our footsteps be guided into the light?

In Bus Stop Inge contrasts no couple with Cherie and Bo. Instead he takes the hero from "People In The Wind" and splits him into two parts: Bo, the young hero, and Virgil Blessing, the man who has guided Bo's steps until he arrived at this stop on life's continuum. Virgil further provides a contrast to Dr. Lyman, the drunken professor; together the older men represent the dark and the light sides of guidance. Lyman makes a half-hearted pass at Elma, the young waitress, but abandons his pursuit early and leaves in self-disgust. Virgil stays behind so that the lovers can begin their journey in life without outside interference. The problem of atonement for past sins is not an issue here. Cherie need not atone for her past lovers, and Bo need not apologize for his lack of them. Virgil will remain behind, Christ-like, to grant them safe-passage, becoming the first sacrifice in a major Inge play.

This personification of dark and light becomes even more pronounced in The Dark At The Top Of The Stairs. The "dark" is physically present throughout the play at the top of the omnipresent staircase. The "light" is in the visit of Sammy Goldenbaum who, again, Christ-like, will be sacrificed to allow for a resolution of the sins of the other characters. Even by this time in the major plays, the dark is more obvious than the light. Sammy blazes briefly in these lives which are dominated by the dark within their own home as well as within their own hearts, and is used by Inge to help dispel some of that dark which prevents the characters from a full experience of love. However, the dark remains at the top of the stairs even in the final scene. Cora must move through it when she goes upstairs to her husband, who waits for her in the doorway to their bedroom.

Inge makes an attempt to revive the contrasting couple of his earlier plays, providing Lottie and her under-sexed husband in contrast to Rubin and Cora. The continuum can again be seen in these implied contrasts: Lottie is unfulfilled by her husband. She has accepted that and arranged to live with it. Cora's husband longs to make love to his wife; all that needs to be changed is her attitude. In a minor key, he also contrasts Reenie and Sammy with Reenie's friend Flirt and Sammy's comrade-in-arms. Flirt bosses Punky Givens very much as Lottie bosses her husband. Reenie, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by Sammy much as Cora had been by Rubin when they first met. For Reenie and Cora, there is hope if they can come to share with their partners. Sammy's death and Reenie's grief and guilt make Cora realize her true feelings for her own mate. In her final ascent to Rubin, Cora seems to have found a definition of "real love". She will continue to love her children, but will respect their own need to be individuals and to fight their own battles. More importantly, she will now free her own feelings so that she can share the physical side of marriage with Rubin. But even as they watched her climb the stairs, moving through the darkness to her husband in the dimmer light beyond, audiences were still overwhelmed by the shock of Sammy's death. If that is what was necessary to bring this family together, it seemed too high a price to pay.

The forces of dark and light actually become more powerful than the couples who personify society's behaviors in this play. This was to continue to be the case throughout the remaining Broadway plays. In the final trio of plays, Inge dealt more and more extensively with an exploration of the dark side of the human experience and consequently endangered the element of hope which was all but essential for audience identification in the Broadway theatre of his day. Atonement in the early plays had changed to sacrifice (in Sammy's case to the ultimate sacrifice) and the ensuing sacrifices became increasingly more and more unacceptable to audiences who had come to respect Inge's exploration of character and his endings, which left a margin for improvement in the futures of those characters. Lila's attempted suicide and adoption of a seamy life-style were offensive in A Loss of Roses, Donnie's bloody murder of a drunken woman was unnecessary and revolting in Natural Affection, and finally, Tom's embrace of societal mores by doing the right thing was too easily accomplished in Where's Daddy? and became unacceptable either as a sacrifice or as good theatre.

The picture painted here would seem to be that of a weak playwright afraid of his own convictions and too easily swayed by his colleagues toward

conclusions he could not support. Is this the case? This would be difficult either to prove or disprove without a detailed analysis of even more of his work. The published texts used throughout this paper are simply not enough. A thorough investigation of original drafts, alternate endings, and especially of scenes revised in rehearsal, on the road and during the Broadway runs needs to be undertaken in a work much larger than this one.

We are intrigued by Inge's own words in this regard:

> Some of the writing was made necessary because so much material had been cut from the first half of the play that I had to make explicit many dramatic values that I had intended to be merely implied. (Roses vii)

What material? Does it still exist? Why was it cut or modified? Because Shirley Booth gave up the part? Should she not be asked? Or should Betty Field who ultimately played Helen not be consulted? Or Warren Beatty or Carol Haney (the Kenny and Lila of that first production) who were supposedly there throughout rehearsals with both of the actresses?

Earlier in this conclusion, I called for a series of interviews with those closely associated with Inge while they are still with us. That series of interviews should include the remaining members of the Inge family; his producers and directors and designers; his performers and his friends; whether they be in his home-town, in New York or in Hollywood. For example, what light could be cast by someone like Mr. Beatty, whose Broadway and Hollywood careers began in works written by Inge?

Perhaps only then could elements in the playwright's own life be identified within his works. If, as Clurman remembers,

> I often heard him say that homosexuality was a form of arrested adolescence, an evasion of responsibility. . . (Clurman 230)

was Inge actually exploring that in his adolescent characters, from assorted Jokers to Sammy and Sonny and Kenny and Donnie (all of whom contain the little boy syllable to complete their names)? Can these be versions of Peter Pan or at least of his syndrome? Does the fact that he worked for years with America's first Peter Pan (Maude Adams) have any bearing on these characters? Until more research becomes available, much must remain as speculation.

Again and again, whether in speculation or through perusal of the published texts, we return to Inge's characters -- therein lies the great strength of his writing, both in the major productions and in the one-act plays which preceded them. True, he used the same character types again and again: the tarnished virgin, the hero's best friend, the long-suffering mother. More than once he explored a situation begun in one play in another that followed: Sammy's remembered date with his mother is replayed between Helen and Kenny in Roses and becomes Donnie's fantasy in Affection. The description of Donnie's father, who could not commit to even seeing Sue's child at birth, is the very situation explored by Where's Daddy? in which Tom plans to leave before seeing his child. The same glimmers of both darkness and light played through the characters of much of Inge's output; and in their reactions, their separate but increasingly negative reactions, he seemed to seek his strength.

The characters are the centre of his work, and to a certain degree they are also at the centre of the problem that arose in that work. To what extent are they personifications of his own problems? Without access to further research, it is difficult to say. What we do know is that his themes and his characters often went in different directions. In order to resolve the plot or to save one of the characters, it often became necessary to abandon another. Kenny is allowed to simply leave in A Loss of Roses; Lila is abandoned to a life of degradation or another suicide attempt. At other times, the dark side of the character would surface and make it impossible for any lighter triumph, as in the case of Donnie in Natural Affection. The truth of the characters as he defined that truth made it difficult for them always to achieve the kind of ending Inge believed, or had been persuaded to believe, would be successful with those people whose acceptance or rejection would determine his own success.

Towards the end of the Broadway career, it became obvious that he chose a number of things to say in each play and found it difficult to separate them so that any of them could be communicated clearly to his audiences and readers. The more detailed his themes and the more convoluted his plots, the more confused his characters became and the more he tended to rely upon the darker side of his own expression. As the dark rose from the basement to the top of the stairs in the second-storey apartment in which he allowed himself to live, the characters who peopled his imagination also became more hopelessly entrapped, involved in their own downfall, and consequently, all hope of atonement, of salvation, of progress -- in short, all hope -- was abandoned.

This loss of hope, or at least the entrapment which led to it, can be underlined by a glance at the playwright's approach to his settings. Those plays with the most hope for the characters, those which permit the most freedom, are performed within settings which permit the most freedom of movement -- more often than not, along the same kind of continuum that allowed him to explore variations on his theme of love. As his themes became darker and the aspects of love he explored became more clandestine, his very settings symbolized the kind of entrapment his characters were doomed to explore. In many cases, he built his characters into a corner so that there was no escape from the darker side of their own natures, no visible means of escape within the confines of the theatrical world he had sketched for them in his setting, and no hope of escape either physically or emotionally from perpetual entrapment. The most powerful moments of his final plays are most often strongly connected to those very forces of entrapment.

The power of some of those dark sequences in his plays (Spencer severs Joker's arteries; Rosemary begs Howard to marry her; Flirt announces Sammy's death; Donnie murders the woman behind the sofa) provide the kind of strength that makes such a scene remain with an audience long after it has been experienced. That is certainly part of the strength that remains behind as Inge's works fade from our stages. There is another strength as well, the strength of characters well and honestly drawn, of human rituals captured for all time, and primarily of that quality that allows us to be fore-warned of our own destinies by the plight of others. The strength in what remains behind after Inge's death is the hope he envisioned -- hope which manifests itself again and again in his characters. Each of his plays begins with at least two characters whose lives interest us. We are immediately drawn to them and are intrigued by both their present position along life's continuum and by the possibilities present for their continuation into a more hopeful future. In many of his works, and most especially in the later ones, those possibilities of future hope are dashed by circumstances which abandon their characters and leave the audience unclear as to exactly why that ending is necessary.

Inge always manifests great respect for innocence and enlists our identification again and again with those characters whose innocence intrigues us. Too often he also appears to equate that state of innocence with either natural ethics or sexual inexperience. It is usually an incident involving a sexual encounter which throws the character off-track, leading either to escape through

running away or to a kind of abandonment of their own common sense, for lack of a better term. It is not necessarily a natural consequence for Lila either to attempt suicide or to throw herself into a life of pornography just because of her intercourse with Kenny. Inge underlines her fragility earlier in the play, but he also gives her that kind of common sense that argues against so extreme a reaction. We are early given to understand that she can see right through Kenny's scams and chooses to be amused instead of presenting him with yet another confrontational female. In Natural Affection, Donnie is incredibly crushed by his mother's rejection of his love and his physical affection, but why does he have to kill before he leaves her life?

Inge seems to suggest that committing a sexual act (or in Donnie's case, committing murder instead of either of the sexual acts: that which is openly requested or that which is only implied) is all that is needed to determine the fate of an individual. While we are innocent, the world is open to us; once we have succumbed to intercourse outside of marriage, we are doomed to wander unsatisfied through the rest of our lives until someone pure and innocent consents to save us. Not everyone can accept that rigid a view of the importance of love or sex in our existence or the possibility (or even desirability) of that kind of fairy-tale conclusion. Inge's views on the matter became more and more rigid throughout his Broadway period, and the kind of hope he had come to offer earlier in his works became less and less possible in the final three plays produced on Broadway. The hope which he had originally envisioned for his characters provided the underlying strength behind both his writing and his success. What happened to Inge is that he abandoned both that strength and the hope promised early both in his work and in his life. It is now the duty of those who were initially drawn to the theatre by Inge and his characters to adopt some of that strength he left to us and to delve even further into how that hope came to be abandoned.

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